



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**EXPLAINING ANTI-U.S. MILITARY BASE SENTIMENT  
IN SOUTH KOREA**

by

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June 2017

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**EXPLAINING ANTI-U.S. MILITARY BASE SENTIMENT IN SOUTH KOREA**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The United States has been South Korea's (the Republic of Korea, or ROK) most influential ally since World War II. It helped defend the South from the North's invasion during the Korean War, and South Korea helped the United States during the Vietnam War. Moreover, the United States and South Korea have come to mutually benefit from extensive economic ties. Nevertheless, the security relationship has shifted over time. In the early 2000s, public protests against U.S. military bases in South Korea soared. This thesis asks: Why has anti-U.S. base sentiment emerged and fluctuated in South Korea? It is argued that, since 1987, the democratization of South Korea affected the country's politics, economics, military, and society. During this transition, a number of governments allowed anti-U.S. base sentiment to take root and grow, especially under the administrations of progressive party leaders. In addition, resurgent Korean nationalism during the early 2000s strained U.S.-ROK relations, which also elevated anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea. Nonetheless, anti-U.S. sentiment has decreased since conservative party leaders won elections in 2008.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AFC	Asian Financial Crisis
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DMZ	demilitarized zone
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GDP	gross domestic product
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
LPP	Land Partnership Plan
NGO	non-governmental organization
NIMBY	not-in-my-back-yard
NLL	northern limited line
NMD	national missile defense
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
ROK	Republic of Korea
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Air Defense
USAG	United States Army Garrison
USFK	United States Forces Korea
WWII	World War II

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

U.S. military bases have been located in South Korea (the Republic of Korea, or ROK) since the end of World War II, chiefly to protect the South from the North and keep the peninsula stable. Since then, the United States and the ROK have become strong allies, especially with regard to the security of the ROK and the region. Although the alliance between the two countries has grown stronger and deeper, anti-U.S. base sentiment has also grown frequent in South Korea, to an extent that United States and ROK government officials and ordinary citizens have sometimes expressed skepticism about the strength of the two countries' relationship. However, anti-U.S. base sentiment and rallies have also varied in intensity. For example, they spiked when a U.S. armored vehicle conducting regular training ran over two schoolgirls on the outskirts of Seoul in 2002, but they plunged in 2010 as North Korea allegedly sunk the Cheonan patrol ship near the Northern Limited Line (NLL) and shelled Yeonpyeong-Island (YP-Do) with artillery.

With this in mind, this thesis investigates the explanatory factors seem to shape variation in anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea. By determining how these factors have seeded, sprouted, and spread in its society, this research helps to understand the nature of anti-U.S. base sentiment for its own sake and determines how it might affect current and future U.S.–ROK relations.

### **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

An alliance is liquid, temporary, and volatile, not a permanent structure. Increasing anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea could lead to misunderstandings or misgivings on the part of both countries' policy-makers and citizens, which could in turn undermine the strong U.S.–ROK relationship. David Straub holds that South Korea and the United States have numerous unknowns and a comparatively weak basic understanding of each other, which leaves them vulnerable to serious misunderstandings

in the realm of security.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, this would undercut seven decades of strong alliance between the two countries and compromise tight U.S.–ROK defense measures in South Korea and the region. Since WWII, U.S. and South Korean policy-makers have made tremendous efforts toward maintaining peace in the South and security from the North. The Korean War in 1950, for example, offers palpable testimony of both the U.S.’s and ROK’s shared strong counter reaction to the Communism at the time. U.S. and ROK military forces fought side by side during the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and shared in bloodshed amid the unsatisfactory result of that war. Military ties between Washington and Seoul have been invaluable and unprecedented in the region and painstakingly built by both governments.

Furthermore, growing anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South might provide an opportunity for North Korea and China to explore weakened and more-vulnerable U.S.–ROK relations for their own advantage. North Korea has long condemned the United States occupation in the South because it compromises the North’s putative plans to reclaim the South and unify the country as it had attempted in 1950. At the same time, China is wary of the U.S. military’s presence near its own territory and its capital city, as this contributes to a challenge of China’s dominance or hegemony in the region.

### **C. LITERATURE REVIEW AND POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

The U.S. military presence in the Korean peninsula began with the end of WWII under a trusteeship in 1948 and a result of the “Containment policy” under Truman’s administration.<sup>2</sup> The will of the communist Soviet Union and the democratic United States divided the Korean peninsula into the North and the South.<sup>3</sup> Those were the salient world’s great powers at the time. The U.S. military forces have been established mainly along the 38th parallel known as the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and expanded to the

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<sup>1</sup> David Straub, *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea* (Stanford, CA: Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2015), 186.

<sup>2</sup> Conrad Schirokauer and Donald N. Clark, *Modern East Asia: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008), 336.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

south. It has gained unwavering respect and legitimacy in the South, especially after the Korean War in 1950. Many South Koreans treated the U.S. military as savior from the communist North and supported the bilateral and unilateral military activities in the country. Moreover, in 1953, the two countries agreed to sign the Mutual Defense Treaty, which is still in effect, to maintain the U.S. military presence in the South.<sup>4</sup> Under those circumstances, the U.S.–ROK alliance had been invariably strong in the region.

Nonetheless, in 1971, the U.S. Seventh Infantry Division of 20,000 troops withdrew from the South principally because of promoting the U.S. allies' self-reliance of own national security or known as the "Guam Doctrine" under the Nixon administration.<sup>5</sup> In the mid-1970s, the Carter administration proclaimed the withdrawal of the entire U.S. military forces from South Korea; however, the plan got dismissed after reexamination of the CIA assessment that North Korea's military power which had far exceeded the South in every aspect in 1979.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the South Korean government strongly opposed the U.S. force withdrawal plan for growing concerns of the North aggression. The last U.S. military force withdrawal in the South occurred during George W. Bush's administration. In 2004, one brigade from the 2nd Infantry Division left South Korea to support the Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and never returned.<sup>7</sup>

Currently, approximately 28,500 military members under the United States Forces Korea (USFK) Command stationed in various places in South Korea to include its capital city, Seoul.<sup>8</sup> A few U.S. bases were established in the legacy of Japanese imperial military bases such as U.S. Army Garrison (USAG) Yongsan in Seoul. The USFK has been dominant force in terms of defending the South and keeping the armistice unbroken since the end of the Korean War in 1953. In March 2002, two governments have agreed

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<sup>4</sup> "U.S. Relations With the Republic of Korea: Fact Sheet," U.S. Department of State, accessed January 25, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2800.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> C.T. Sandars, *America's Overseas Garrisons: The Leasehold Empire*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 191.

<sup>6</sup> Larry A. Niksch, "U.S. Troop Withdrawal from South Korea: Past Shortcomings and Future Prospects," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, no 3, (March 1981): 332.

<sup>7</sup> Straub, *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea*, 206.

<sup>8</sup> "2016 Index of U.S. Military Strength," The Heritage Foundation, accessed May 18, 2017, <http://index.heritage.org/military/2016/assessments/operating-environment/asia/>.

to relocate the majority of northern U.S. bases in a central location called the “Land Partnership Plan (LPP)” and this process has been moving forward despite domestic discourse and protests in the South.<sup>9</sup>

Anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea has emerged, spread, and fluctuated with evolving new ideas and changing domestic and international environments. Table 1, based on preliminary research, offers a summary assessment of levels of anti-base sentiment and of various possible explanatory factors over five-year increments since the start of South Korea’s democratization. In summary, anti-U.S. base sentiment peaked approximately fifteen years ago and has been declining again since.

Table 1. Anti-U.S. Base Sentiment Variable Factors and Effects

	<b>87–93</b>	<b>93–98</b>	<b>98–03</b>	<b>03–08</b>	<b>08–13</b>	<b>13–Present</b>
Progressive President	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Democratization Level	Low	Med	High	High	High	High
Nationalism Level	Low	Med	High	High	High	High
USFK Mishap Level	Low	Low	Med	Low	Low	Low
Non-base Incident Level	Low	Low	High	High	Low	Low
DPRK Threat Level	High	High	Med	Med	High	High
Generation Gap Level	Low	Low	Med	High	High	High
Economic Growth	High	High	Med	High	Med	Med
Media Growth	Med	Med	High	High	High	High
US-ROK Relations Strength	High	High	Med	Med	High	High
US-DPRK Rel. Strength	Med	Med	Low	Low	Low	Low
Sino-ROK Relation Strength	<u>Med</u>	<u>Med</u>	<u>Med</u>	<u>Med</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>High</u>
<b>Anti-U.S. Base Protest</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Med</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>

<sup>9</sup> Yuko Kawato, *Protests Against U.S. Military Base Policy in Asia: Persuasion and Its Limits*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 117.

Prior to its democratization in 1987, the South had a traditional military regime that had overthrown civilian government and suppressed opposition. In 1980, for example, during the Kwangju democratic movement in Cholla province, military forces under General Chun Doohwan fired upon and brutally killed hundreds of unarmed and innocent citizens on the streets, in a manner similar to the Tiananmen massacre in China nine years later.<sup>10</sup> In the aftermath of the Kwangju massacre, it was widely spread skepticism of the U.S. role in the South at the time of the incident that many believed and accused the U.S. of tacitly approving the Chun's military regime to conduct a coup and ignore the Kwangju massacre.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. government invited the new authoritarian leader General Chun to Washington shortly after the coup instead of condemning the military atrocity. For this reason, a massive number of South Koreans were skeptical about the controversial U.S. policy on democratization of the South and drawn to anti-U.S. military sentiment.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, older generations in the South appreciated the U.S. military for defending its country from the North's invasion during the Korean War and the U.S.'s economic support toward rebuilding the devastated country from wartime destruction. Lastly, South Korea's persistent security threat from the North kept the South's citizens in an alarmed state and persuaded them not to disrupt U.S. military bases operations, in order to maintain a collaborative defense of the country. For these reasons, anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South prior to democratization was almost non-existent.

Anti-U.S. base sentiment during 1987–93 remained low. Several factors may have caused this. First is that mutual understanding of the strong U.S.–ROK security alliance, necessary to deter the North, continued to dampen and outweigh anti-U.S. base sentiment. Second, the democratically elected conservative government of the time still had a military background and still had means of addressing popular anti-U.S. base

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<sup>10</sup> Chang Hun Oh and Celeste Arrington, "Democratization and Changing Anti-American Sentiments in South Korea," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 47, no. 2 (April 2007): 336–37.

<sup>11</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, "South Korean Anti-Americanism: A Comparative Perspective," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 36, no. 8 (August 1996), 793. Chang Hun Oh and Celeste Arrington, "Democratization and Changing Anti-American Sentiments in South Korea," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 47, no. 2 (March 2007), 337.

<sup>12</sup> Sandars, *America's Overseas Garrisons*, 186.

sentiment through coercive suppression. HyungGu Lynn points out that Roh's government was nearly identical to the previous authoritarian regime.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the military-background president, as an individual, had additional incentive not to allow protests against U.S. bases due to his own connection to the Kwangju massacre. Furthermore, anti-U.S. base individuals and groups had not yet formed the strong organizations of civic groups or NGOs that would later help drive protest against government authority, despite underlying anti-U.S. base sentiment. According to Andrew Yeo, "Local NIMBY [not-in-my-backyard] protests had existed prior to this point, but only from the mid-1990s did civic groups at the national level attempt to form a broader coalition movement."<sup>14</sup>

From 1993 to 1998, anti-U.S. base sentiment was moderate in the South. For the first time since 1961, the South elected a non-military and liberal leader, Kim Youngsam, as its president. President Kim legally pursued the military officers who had authorized the Kwangju massacre in 1980 and imprisoned them. He also dismantled the legacy of military elite organizations within the ROK military, such as "*Hanahoe*"<sup>15</sup> and stabilized civil-military relationship in the South.<sup>16</sup>

Anti-U.S. base sentiment from 1998 to 2003 was high. Analysts such as Straub describe it as recording its highest levels during the period from 1999 to 2002.<sup>17</sup> During this time, several base-related incidents occurred, such as a toxic chemical spillage in the Han River from USAG Yongsan and USFK military training mishaps, which appeared to enrage South Koreans.<sup>18</sup> This seems to have been partially fueled by South Korea's new left-of-center government. The newly elected president Kim Daejung was often portrayed

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<sup>13</sup> Hyung Gu Lynn, *Bipolar Orders: The Two Koreas since 1989*, (New York: Zed Books, 2007), 39.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, And Anti-U.S. Base Protests*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 130.

<sup>15</sup> *Hanahoe* (One group) was a military association that was established among the Korean Military Academy graduates under General Chun Dohwan. Many officers in this group partook the overthrow of Choe Kyuhwa government after President Park Jonghee's assassination in 1979.

<sup>16</sup> Lynn, *Bipolar Orders: The Two Koreas since 1989*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Straub, *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea*, 180.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.



as the “Nelson Mandela of Asia.”<sup>19</sup> He advocated the pro-North-engagement policy known as the “Sunshine Policy.”

From 2003 to 2008, anti-U.S. base sentiments remained at high levels. During this period, the South elected another left-of-center president, Roh Moohyun, who was seen as skeptical of the value of the U.S.–ROK relationship. Andrew Yeo notes the intensity and extreme nature of the 2005 anti-U.S. base protests over relocation of some U.S. facilities to Pyongtaek.<sup>20</sup> In early 2000s, the U.S. and the ROK government had agreed on this U.S. base relocation project, consolidating northern U.S. bases to one location in further south. However, NGOs (non-government organizations), local villagers, and supporters (including media) lashed back against the government’s decision, mobilized around the base area in Pyongtaek, and conducted prolonged protests.

The period from 2008 to 2013 saw a return to low anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South. Growing threats from the North and a change in party control of the presidency may have influenced this low anti-U.S. base sentiment. In 2010, the North’s security threat reached high levels unlike those of previous years. North Korea provoked the South by sinking its Cheonan patrol ship and shelling artillery on Yeonpyeong-Do, killing close to a hundred sailors, marines, and civilians in total in 2010. In addition, the North continued to test its nuclear weapons and various ranges of missiles, threatening not only the South, but also its allies and partners—namely, the United States and Japan. Hence, anti-U.S. base sentiment during this period plunged.

Lastly, anti-U.S. base sentiment since 2013 has remained low despite the uncertain status of six-party nuclear talks—but this may be in flux. South Korea has recently begun to face potentially nation-wide protests against employing the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) unit in the South that supposed to build a defensive system against growing North’s missiles and nuclear threat. However, protest in the South thus far appears to be directed more at the ROK government itself for its

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<sup>19</sup> Lynn, *Bipolar Orders: The Two Koreas since 1989*, 44.

<sup>20</sup> Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, And Anti-U.S. Base Protests*, 135.

perceived sudden and imprudent decision than at the U.S. military. At the same time, salient threats from the North, in the form of missile and nuclear tests, have continued.

It should be noted that some deny any significant level of anti-U.S. sentiment in the first place. Straub holds that some USFK Officials and scholars, and many South Koreans flatly deny that protest activity in the South, even at its peak from 1999 to 2002, represents genuinely anti-U.S. base sentiment.<sup>21</sup>

### **1. Explanations for Anti-base Sentiment: Democratization**

Explanations for anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea—and for its increase, in particular—have two primary themes: 1) democratization, and 2) growing nationalism. However, other explanations might be possible as well.

The first prevalent school of thought found in the literature on anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea is that democratization is the main cause. The emergence of democracy is certainly correlated with the emergence of significant anti-base protest at all, which is this study looks only at post-authoritarian years and assesses variation *within* that most recent period of South Korea's history. Before democratic transition began in 1987, social and environmental issues related to U.S. bases in the South had attracted a little attention among the public.<sup>22</sup> Alexander Cooley, among others, points out that anti-U.S. base sentiment emerged as South Korea's democratization began in the early 1990s.<sup>23</sup> Although the Kwangju incident of 1980 became an important symbol for mobilizing anti-U.S. base activists and supporters in the South, anti-U.S. base protests themselves began in the 1990s upon democratization.<sup>24</sup> Yeo states that the first sign of changing public perception of the U.S. base presence in the South was ushered in by the "Yoon Geumi Murder Case," a widely publicized rape-murder committed by a USFK member in 1992.<sup>25</sup> South Korea's democratization had begun in 1987, just before it

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<sup>21</sup> Straub, *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea*, 196–97.

<sup>22</sup> Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, And Anti-U.S. Base Protests*, 129.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Change and the U.S. Military Overseas*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 95.

<sup>24</sup> Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Change and The U.S. Military Overseas*, 111.

<sup>25</sup> Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, And Anti-U.S. Base Protests*, 129.

hosted the Summer Olympic Games in 1988. The newly elected president, Roh Taewoo, and greater exposure to the rest of the world gradually promoted and allowed citizens to participate in social activism and incentivized citizens to openly express their grievances, especially against government officials.

In addition, democratic competition between political parties and increasing media involvement helped change the population's views of the U.S. military presence in their country. In 2002, for example, both progressive and conservative party leaders criticized the U.S. military for a training mishap in Highway 56 despite an apology and reparation made from the USFK Command immediately after the incident, and this incident was seized upon by various forms of mass media (including Internet-based media), yielding negative images of U.S. bases in the South.<sup>26</sup>

However, political parties in the South often display different attitudes and pursue different national security policies, and the difference between progressive and conservative political parties' security policies concerning the country's direct adversary (North Korea) has a significant impact on pro- and anti-US sentiment. Anti-U.S. base sentiment reached its pinnacle under the left-progressive governments (Presidents Kim Daejung and Roh Moohyun) in office from 1997 to 2007. These progressive governments emphasized self-reliance when dealing with national security. In 2000, for example, President Kim Daejung reached out to Kim Jongil, the North's leader, and met face-to-face with him in Pyongyang to discuss matters between the South and the North. In addition, one of Kim's well-known policies towards the North, the "Sunshine Policy," viewed the North as comparatively friendly.

On the other hand, anti-U.S. base sentiment seemingly reduces when the right-conservative governments hold office. From 2007 to 2017, conservative governments (Presidents Lee Myongbak and Park Geunhye) presided over a declining frequency of anti-U.S. rallies and demonstrations. Conservative governments have also proven reluctant to negotiate or otherwise deal with the North: Kumgang Mountain tourism, for example, one fruit of negotiations between the North and the South, had ceased by Lee's

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<sup>26</sup> Alexander Cooley, "Democratization and the Contested Politics of U.S. Military Bases in Korea: Towards A Comparative Understanding," *국제관계연구* 10, no. 2 (2005): 219.

administration, after a Northern soldier shot and killed a South Korean tourist walking on the beach. More recently, Park's administration closed the Kaesong joint industrial park after the North carried out its fourth nuclear test in January 2016.

## **2. Explanations for Anti-base Sentiment: Nationalism**

The second main explanation for anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South is growing nationalism—growth from an already high level of nationalism to begin with. The foundations of Korean nationalism can be traced back hundreds of years. Korean history emphasizes Koreans' success in surviving without assimilation into dominant neighbor countries such as China and Japan. B.R. Myers, meanwhile, argues that Korean ethnic identity (in both the South and the North) is perceived as a type of pure-race “mono-ethnicity.”<sup>27</sup> Throughout modern history, Koreans have ultimately successfully resisted long-term foreign invasion.

Some scholars argue that Korean's nationalism has grown even stronger in recent years. This growing nationalism affects both the U.S.–ROK and ROK–Japan relationships. Younger (post-Korean War era) generations, in particular, seem to be driving this movement. Unlike older generations, younger generations inherited economic strength through older generations' hard work while rebuilding the country from the ashes of the Korean War.<sup>28</sup> Rapid developmental-state economic growth contributed to greater education levels for younger generations in South Korea, and this elevated nationalism (notably, at least as much both the political left as on the political right). A RAND report identifies that U.S. favorable rates in South Korea gradually decline as the level of education increases in 1990s and the early 2000s.<sup>29</sup> As a result, young generations in the South tend to perceive both the United States and Japan in an unfavorable light as former colonial occupiers.

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<sup>27</sup> B.R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters*, (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2010), 72.

<sup>28</sup> Brad Glosserman and Scott Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 75.

<sup>29</sup> Eric V. Larson et al., *Ambivalent Allies?: A Study of South Korean Attitudes Toward the U.S.* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004), 98.

At the same time, younger generations are shifting South Koreans' view of North Korea, perceiving less threat from North Korea than their fathers or grandfathers had. This friendly approach to the North may contribute to weakened support for the U.S.–ROK security alliance in the South. The resulting friction helps drive imbued rallies and demonstrations against not only the ROK's own government but also against U.S. bases in the South. Generally, nationalists demand a more equal-level partnership with the U.S., rather than apparent patron-client or senior-junior relations. In the background is the fact that South Korea has grown increasingly strong in almost every aspect of economics, security, and diplomacy. This new phenomenon of increasing self-confidence has also fueled nationalism rooted in homogeneity. It may lead South Koreans increasingly to express concerns toward the international community (especially the United States and China) – and, at the same time, drives a certain amount of responsibility to demonstrate capability to the world, which in some contexts is seen as running counter to dependence on U.S. military cooperation.

From a nationalist viewpoint in South Korea, anti-U.S. base sentiment reflects self-confidence and self-assertiveness rather than hatred. South Korea's position in the world economy (13th place), its hosting of the 2002 soccer World Cup (and its 4<sup>th</sup>-place finish), and its unique status as a recipient-turned-donor of international aid has boosted confidence, a desire for equal treatment, and nationalism. As a result, South Korea may pursue and claim independence in dealing with its half-brother (North Korea) without outsiders' help; much like a self-confident adolescent refuses parents' help.

### **3. Explanations for Anti-Base Sentiment: Other Factors**

One narrow and concrete but quite important factor is the occurrence of “incidents” and provocations by the North, by personnel from the USFK itself, and by non-military (and sometimes completely non-political) U.S. actors. Though specific Northern provocations might have shorter-term effects, and while specific incidents on the part of USFK personnel (crimes or accidents) might be the necessary proximate cause of increased anti-U.S. base sentiment. This writer hypothesizes that *sustained* changes in levels of anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea derive primarily from the more general

state of US-ROK relations and regional security, rather than short-term, “exogenous-shock” USFK mishaps or belligerent North Korean rhetoric.

China’s role in the region may also influence anti-U.S. base sentiment. If China, the rising regional hegemon and North Korea’s closest ally, shifts its amiable foreign policy towards South Korea, how would this affect anti-U.S. base sentiment? In other words, hypothetically, if China were no longer interested in the North’s regime and turned to the South for increased economic and security cooperation, how would this affect anti-U.S. base sentiment? For better or worse? This writer would assume that anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea will likely increase as (or *if*) it balances with China’s friendly approach.

As noted previously, another factor in fluctuating anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South may be changing generations’ views of the world, independent of nationalism *per se*. Since the cold war, the communist threat has been significantly reduced. This reality and changing dynamic in the world’s environment reduces the North’s perceived threat to newer generation in the South though the degree of perceived Northern threat continues to fluctuate even within the post-Cold War period. In addition, younger generations’ view on the U.S., China, and other states are much different from that of the older or even the middle-aged “386” generation’s.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, South Korea’s exponential economic growth also incentivized its citizens to travel around the world and exposed them to new ideas that may have changed their perceptions toward the U.S. military presence.

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<sup>30</sup> The 386 generation in South Korea refers to a post war generation who were born in 1960s and known for pro-democracy. It also named after the computer model (Intel 386 processing software) in 1990s.

## **II. EXPLANATIONS FOR ANTI-BASE SENTIMENT: DEMOCRATIZATION**

Anti-U.S. military base sentiment in the South emerged more or less with democratization after 1987, as has often been the case with other countries with U.S. military bases (though Cooley has also argued that “the basing issue will recede from the U.S.–ROK political agenda in the medium and longer terms, just as it did in these other cases”).<sup>31</sup> Cooley, in his book, states:

As in Spain or the Philippines, democratization in South Korea has generated significant nationalism and anti-American sentiment, with accompanying attention to base-related issues. What distinguishes the seemingly more virulent Korean antibase activism is not its veracity or emotional content, but its skillful and effective use of new media and technologies to keep its message on the national political agenda.<sup>32</sup>

In this chapter, this writer examines three main components: partisan effects, especially the rise of the left as a new political force; democratic consolidation in general; and media expansion.

### **A. PARTISAN DIFFERENCES AND ANTI-U.S. BASE SENTIMENT**

Beginning in 1987, South Korea reformed its political system toward pursuit of more liberal democracy. South Korea was governed by “soft authoritarians”—through a military regime from 1948 until 1987 despite the democratic U.S.’ enormous influence after WWII. In 1987, the South ended its military regime with its first democratic popular vote for the president. Since that historical event, each five-year term of each presidency in the South has seen remarkable democratic developments. By 2005, Freedom House upgraded South Korea’s political rights rating to its maximum rating of 1 and it explained “South Korea’s political rights rating improved from 2 to 1 due to the

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<sup>31</sup> Andrew Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, And Anti-U.S. Base Protests*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Alexander Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Change and The U.S. Military Overseas*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), including cited material at p. 203; Yuko Kawato, *Protests Against U.S. Military Base Policy in Asia: Persuasion and Its Limits*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Cooley, *Base Politics*, 124.

holding of free and fair parliamentary elections following a highly politicized impeachment process.”<sup>33</sup> This top political rights rating also reflects South Korea’s political transition since the Freedom House’s recordings in 1998.

Democracy especially empowered progressive party governments, in contrast with the conservative parties, who gained less, given that they were the direct political descendants of the authoritarian leadership. At the same time, anti-U.S. military base sentiment in South Korea erupted substantially after 1987. It has also varied among the presidencies. The anti-U.S. military sentiment has soared in the South during the progressive presidencies of Kim Daejung and Roh Moohyun—from 1998 to 2007.

Straub strongly argues that democratization empowered progressive government leaders more than the conservative party governments mainly due to progressive parties character and a strong public demand for democratization (note that the progressive and conservative sides have each had only one main party since democratization, but that each of those two parties has changed its name several times).<sup>34</sup> He writes, “Progressive leaders contributed to the popular narrative of American support for Chun Doo-hwan and complicity in the Kwangju incident not only because they actually believed it but also because they calculated that they could use it to force the United States to move against their Korean military-backed opponents.”<sup>35</sup> Straub also states, with regard to President Kim Daejung, the first progressive president, that “These included not only Kim’s political party but also labor unions, progressive NGOs, the progressive media, and some faith-based groups. Empowerment meant that they felt freer to express frustrations, including against the United States, frustrations that had been pent-up for decades. Some felt that they could garner more attention and political and financial support for progressive forces in general, and for their own organizations in particular, by focusing on the United States, especially USFK.”<sup>36</sup> In addition, the progressives’ Sunshine Policy

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<sup>33</sup> “Freedom In The World : South Korea,” Freedom House, accessed June 6, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2005/south-korea>.

<sup>34</sup> Straub, *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea*, 190.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 191.



towards the North clouded public opinion toward the North's threat and painted the U.S. military as less important or detrimental for North-South relations. Figure 1, based on survey results from the Pew Research Center, clearly shows that the percentage of respondents with a favorable view of the United States fell particularly low during the progressive Roh Moohyun's administration in 2003.

## Opinion of the United States

### Do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of the U.S.?

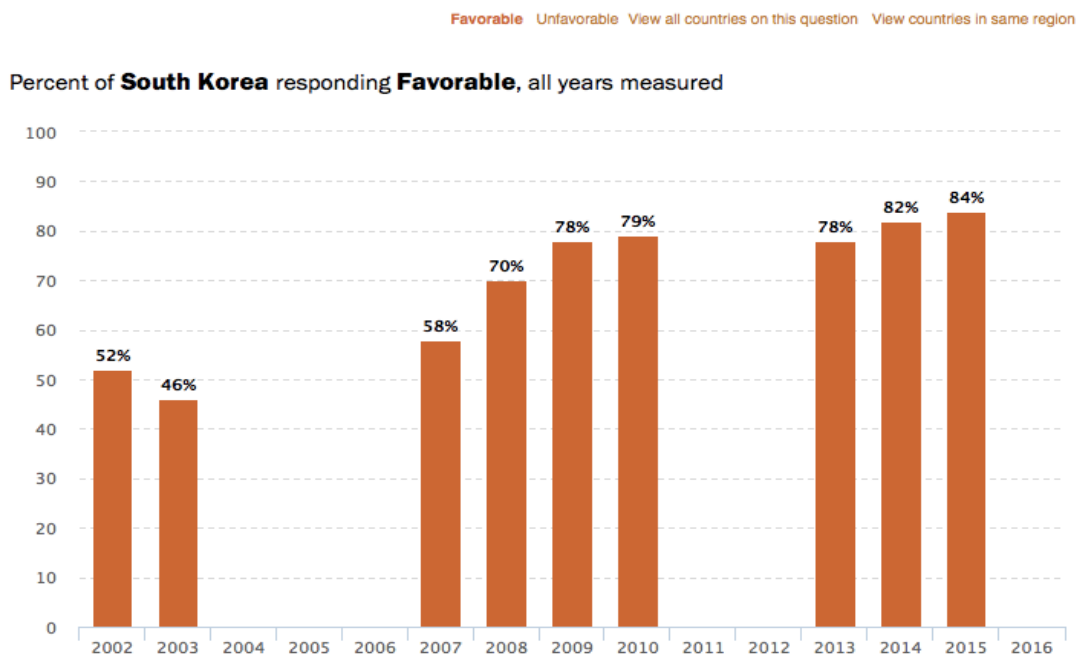


Figure 1. South Koreans' Opinion of the United States<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, conservative parties have traditionally promoted pro-American measures that often resulted in suppressing anti-U.S. military activities under the National Security Law of 1948. Under Presidents Roh Taewoo and Kim Youngsam, many dissidents were arrested for undermining the stability of the countries over the North's threat. Other conservative leaders, like President Lee Myongbak and President Park Geunhye have had ostensible pro-American stances, which helped reduce anti-U.S.

<sup>37</sup> Source: "Global Indicators Database: South Korea," Pew Research Center, accessed April 14, 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/database/indicator/1/country/116/>.

military sentiment – with help from North Korea’s imminent threat – in 2010 and 2015. In 2010, for example, the North’s military provoked the South twice—it sunk the Cheonan patrol vessel and shelled Yeonpyeong-do—despite improved relations spurred by the previous administration’s Sunshine policy. In addition, ongoing Northern brinkmanship via missiles and nuclear threats after the Roh Moohyun administration spread the perception of threat from Pyongyang among South Koreans. Thus, the pro-U.S. conservative government and the North’s elevated threat level combined to create a robust U.S.–ROK military alliance.

## **B. DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION AND ANTI-U.S. BASE SENTIMENT**

### **1. President Roh Taewoo (1988–1993)**

In 1987, the South had its first democratic presidential election and elected President Roh Taewoo. Prior to the election, authoritarian President Chun Doo-hwan initially had planned that Roh, who worked intimately within Chun’s regime, would succeed Chun without a legitimate presidential election. However, the democratic movement among ordinary citizens had risen rapidly against the regime and strongly opposed this automatic transition. Thus, Roh dismissed the initial succession plan and assured the public a general vote for the upcoming presidential selection. Upon his eventual election, he also confirmed respect for and promoted democracy by reforming the political system after the prolonged military dictatorship under President Park Jonghee and President Chun Doo-hwan. This democratic presidential election opened a new chapter for the country. President Roh was a prior Army General and conservative. One year after his election, the country hosted the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, which provided the South a chance to broadly open and expose the country to the rest of the world. This worldwide event undoubtedly incentivized and encouraged the South to push forward and move toward the world’s nominal democratic standard.

At the same time, the removal of the Berlin wall in Germany in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 changed the geopolitical space, which provided the South an opportunity to normalize its relations with former Communist countries in Eastern Europe and China. Roh personally favored “Nordpolitik” to befriend former

Communist countries. Scott Snyder writes, “The Nordpolitik policy was an expression of South Korea’s political desire to establish new diplomatic relationships with Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, China, and eventually North Korea.”<sup>38</sup> As a result, the South normalized formerly strained relationship with the Soviet Union (SU) in 1990, entered the UN (United Nations) with the North in 1991, and established diplomatic ties with China in 1992.<sup>39</sup> In addition, President Roh agreed to sign the Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, and Exchange and Cooperation with North Korea in 1991.<sup>40</sup> Despite his suppression of emerging anti-U.S. military sentiment, Roh’s presidency set up greater liberalization, a freer press, and expanded freedom to travel, worship, associate, and think.<sup>41</sup> He also allowed the emergence of the progressive newspaper *Hankyoreh*, which promoted freedom of expression for the public interested in facts, different views, and opinions. President Roh, as the first democratically elected president, embraced and benchmarked the democratic transition and set preconditions for successive leaders in the South.

## **2. President Kim Youngsam (1993–1998)**

In 1992, Kim Youngsam, the first non-military president and a longtime anti-military regime activist, won the presidential election. In 1954, as a young and ambitious democracy activist, Kim Youngsam entered the National Assembly, and shortly after, he fought against the authoritarian military leader Park Chunghee.<sup>42</sup> Park’s regime repeatedly suppressed and imprisoned its dissidents in 1970s, and Kim Youngsam was ousted from the National Assembly, imprisoned, and sentenced to house arrest during this

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<sup>38</sup> Scott Snyder, *China’s Rise and The Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 32.

<sup>39</sup> Larson et al., *Ambivalent Allies?*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Chang Hun Oh and Celeste Arrington, “Democratization and Changing Anti-American Sentiments in South Korea,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 47, no. 2 (April 2007), 339.

<sup>41</sup> Schirokauer and Clark, *Modern East Asia*, 436.

<sup>42</sup> Chaibong Hahm, “South Korea’s Miraculous Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19, no. 19 (July 2008): 131.

time.<sup>43</sup> He was one of the most well-known pro-democracy movement figures in the South. Samuel Kim in his book explains;

Korea's transition to democracy began in 1987–88 and five years later, with the presidential victory of Kim Young Sam in 1992, Korea elected its first civilian leader in three decades. Equally important, a few years after this dramatic political accomplishment, Korea gained entry, as the eleventh largest economy in the world, into the exclusive country club of rich industrialized nations—the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).<sup>44</sup>

Surprisingly, Kim Youngsam joined the Conservative Party shortly before he was elected as President. He had continuously pursued and continued democratic transition toward thoroughly civilian and democratic government (*munmin*). In addition, Kim campaigned for vigorous globalization (*saegwah*). At the same time, he successfully removed the military from politics and reformed the military along the lines of standard civil-military structure. Kim dismissed the intra-military clique *Hanahoe* to weaken the overall military's traditionally strong and dominant power in broad areas in government and society.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, he fought corruption by reforming the bank system to require an authentic name rather than fictitious ones for bank account, in order to eradicate illegal funds transfers and money laundering. Hahm assures, "South Korea's democracy became stronger as a result of these reforms."<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Kim brought the two previous presidents— Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo—who were also military generals, to court for carrying out the Kwangju massacre in 1980, and this also significantly weakened the military's influence in politics and helped created a civilian-controlled military and government.

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<sup>43</sup> Hahm, "South Korea's Miraculous Democracy," 131.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel S. Kim, *Korea's Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Hahm, "South Korea's Miraculous Democracy," 135.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

On the other hand, Kim's administration suppressed radical anti-American movements and pro-North activities. Government officials apprehended over 5,700 student members of *Hanchongryon* (a student activist group) in 1996.<sup>47</sup> In 1997, the Kim Youngsam administration encountered the spillover of the Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) before the end of his presidency in 1998.

### **3. President Kim Daejung (1998–2003)**

Kim Daejung, who was also a pro-democracy activist, won the presidential election of 1997 and took over the presidency in 1998. This progressive leader and his party's first time in government marked the country as a more modern and liberal democracy. Unlike other leaders, he grew up in Cholla province, an almost forgotten and poorly developed region in the South. Kim inherited his office with a crumbling economy caused by the AFC in 1997. His administration successfully managed and recovered from a huge dip in economic growth and later accelerated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. The South Korea's GDP growth dropped to -5.7 percent in 1998 and sharply rebounded to 10.7 percent in 1999.<sup>48</sup> Economists such as Tsunekawa argue that he was best fit for fixing the malpractice of *chaebol* or conglomerates at the time of the AFC because unlike previous leaders, he had a little to no relationship with them.<sup>49</sup> As a result, the South's government quickly reacted by implementing appropriate policies and rejoined the world economy.

On the other hand, he had sought and pursued a normal relationship with the half-brother, North Korea. To this end, his administration adopted the engagement policy known for as the "Sunshine Policy" to promote peace and stability between the two countries. As a result, the Koreas' two leaders—President Kim Daejung and Kim Jongil—held a summit in Pyongyang, North Korea, in 2000 and agreed on further

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<sup>47</sup> Oh and Arrington, "Democratization and Changing Anti-American Sentiments in South Korea," 341.

<sup>48</sup> "GDP Growth (annual %)," The World Bank, accessed June 6, 2017, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2015&locations=Z4-KR&start=1961&view=chart>.

<sup>49</sup> Keiichi Tsunekawa, "Japan: The Political Economy of Long Stagnation," In *Two Crises Different Outcomes: East Asia and Global Finance*, ed. T.J. Pempel and Keiichi Tsunekawa (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 211.

collaboration and cooperation. President Kim's peaceful engagement with the North, improved domestic human rights, and democratization efforts were primarily recognized during his Nobel Prize recipient ceremony in 2000.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, Kim's administration often conflicted with the U.S. government because of differing views on domestic and international affairs, especially dealings with the North. Politically, the U.S.'s hawkish foreign policy regarding the Korean peninsula was seen to have negatively affected the South and eventually weakened the U.S.-ROK relationship. *The Irish Times* in 2001 stated, "Mr. Bush was blamed for heightening tensions on the Korean peninsula at an anti-US rally yesterday by 2,000 members of South Korean non-governmental organizations. The protestors urged the United States to stop citing North Korea as a reason for developing its national missile defense (NMD) system."<sup>51</sup> The two governments' different views towards the North arguably caused frictions between them. Moreover, in 2002, shortly after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, President George W. Bush declared North Korea as part of the "Axis of Evil" alongside several other countries in the Middle East during his first the State of Union address.<sup>52</sup> President Bush also stated, "States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred."<sup>53</sup> This statement undermined the North and South interrelationship and dismayed both Koreans.

With this declaration, however, many Koreans, both in the South and North, perceived imminent danger of a war in the Korean peninsula, because countries like Iraq were among the Axis of Evil, which meant U.S. forces might preemptively strike these countries in the near future. In this context, many activists and extremists in the South

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<sup>50</sup> "The Nobel Peace Prize 2000: Kim Dae-jung-Facts," Nobel Prize Organization, accessed May 12, 2017, [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2000/dae-jung-facts.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2000/dae-jung-facts.html).

<sup>51</sup> "Anti-US sentiment grows in South Korea," *The Irish Times*, April 8, 2001, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/anti-us-sentiment-grows-in-south-korea-1.380008>.

<sup>52</sup> "President Bush's first State of the Union Address," The White House, accessed April 7, 2017, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

criticized the United States for being belligerent and painted it as a greater war threat than China or even the North.

#### **4. President Roh Moohyun (2003–2008)**

In 2003, Roh Moohyun, another left and progressive leader, was elected President. President Roh was perceived to be anti-U.S. and pro-North during his presidential candidacy. He was especially popular among the young generation and the more-middle-aged postwar generation known as the “386 generations,” who seemed to value Roh’s self-confidence and autonomy. The Roh administration inherited the pro-North policy of the former President Kim Daejung. Unlike other leaders, Roh had pursued “self-reliance” in the ROK’s security posture by signing an agreement for Operational Control transfer from the USFK to the ROK Joint Chiefs Staff (JCS) in 2003. During his presidency, civil groups and NGOs grew in high numbers and often debated the government over broader civil issues such as base relocation to the south. As his predecessor Kim did, Roh continually worked to normalize the ROK’s relation with the North and held a summit with the North’s leader, Kim Jong-Il, in 2007. However, Roh also became the first president in the South to be accused of corruption and incompetency, though the Constitutional Court dismissed the case as inappropriate.<sup>54</sup> In 2005, Freedom House revealed that South Korea had improved its overall freedom rating (Best=1, Worst=7) from 2 to 1.5, in part, due to the impeachment process.<sup>55</sup> With this new record, democratic transition during Roh’s administration showed remarkable improvement since 1987.

Contrary to many experts’ expectations, Roh cooperated with the United States in various affairs, including military. His government backed and assisted base relocation and the consolidation of the northern U.S. bases to a central location (Camp Humphreys). He agreed to support the War on Terror with the Bush administration and deployed support units to OIF as part of the “coalition of the willing.”<sup>56</sup> In addition, his

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<sup>54</sup> Hahm, “South Korea’s Miraculous Democracy,” 138.

<sup>55</sup> “Freedom In The World: South Korea,” Freedom House, accessed May 19, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2005/south-korea>.

<sup>56</sup> Hahm, “South Korea’s Miraculous Democracy,” 137.

government initiated the U.S.–ROK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to stimulate mutual economic growth.

## **5. President Lee Myongbak (2008–2013)**

In 2008, Lee Myongbak became President, and his administration codified the disputed U.S.–ROK FTA. President Lee was a businessperson under the Hyundai group who later entered politics. Unlike his predecessor Roh, Lee was a traditional conservative and known for being pro-U.S. and holding a hard line on security vis-à-vis the North, both of which disturbed the Northern regime. Hence, the North did not favor Lee's administration and provoked the South militarily directly several times in 2010. In March 2010, the North sunk the Cheonan patrol ship near the Northern Limit Line (NLL) with a torpedo from a small submarine and attacked Yeonpyeong-do with artillery fire in November. The North's salient threat to the South brought a tighter and stronger working relationship between the United States and the ROK, especially in military affairs to encounter the tangible threat from the North. A decade of moderate views on the North's threat had instantly changed and emerged again with the two incidents. Both the government and the public revalued the U.S. military role in the South.

Nevertheless, in 2008, shortly after he was in office, President Lee also had announced removing a ban on U.S. beef imports as part of the ROKUS FTA. U.S. beef imports had been suspended since 2003, and the Lee administration's decision enraged the public and caught the President off guard.<sup>57</sup> South Korea was third in U.S. beef consumption in 2003; however, beef imports had stopped for almost a decade because the public perceived the mad cow disease that erupted in the United States to be potentially harmful for human consumption. Farmers, interest groups, and public opinion in the South opposed this deal and demonstrated against the government on the streets in major cities with candlelight vigils and marches.

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<sup>57</sup> Sanghun Choe, "Beef Protest Turns Violent in South Korea," *New York Times*, June 30, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/30/world/asia/30korea.html>.



## 6. President Park Geunhye (2013–2017)

In 2012, Park Geunhye, a conservative and the former authoritarian President Park Jonghee's daughter, was elected as the ROK's president, and she took office in early 2013. In 2014, Freedom House revealed that its overall freedom rating for South Korea (Best=1, Worst=7) had declined after a decade, to 2.<sup>58</sup> This decrease occurred almost ten years after it achieved a near-top rating. According to Freedom House, "South Korea's political rights rating declined from 1 to 2 due to high-profile scandals involving corruption and abuse of authority, including alleged meddling in political affairs by the National Intelligence Service."<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, President Park adopted her predecessor's legacy and continued a pro-U.S. foreign policy. At the same time, she improved the ROK's relationship with China with an eye toward continued mutual economic growth and stability in the Korean peninsula. In September 2015, President Park participated in China's 70th anniversary of the end of WWII celebration in Beijing as an honorary guest while the North's new leader (Kim Jongun) was not invited.<sup>60</sup> She told China's President Xi while in Beijing that "I would like to thank China for its constructive role in closely communicating with us in order to resolve the latest tension on the Korean Peninsula."<sup>61</sup> President Park took a very pragmatic approach to the United States and China.

She also continuously took a hard line of tit-for-tat approaches towards the North. As a result, her administration shut down the joint industrial park at Kaesong in February 2016 after the North tested its fifth nuclear weapon system followed by a rocket in January and February, respectively.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Park's administration decided to deploy the U.S. THAAD system to defend the country from the North's formidable missiles and

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<sup>58</sup> "Freedom In The World: South Korea," Freedom House, accessed May 19, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/south-korea>.

<sup>59</sup> "Freedom In The World: South Korea," <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/south-korea>.

<sup>60</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, "South Korea's President and China's Military Parade: Park's Talk with Xi Focused on North Korea, But Historical Issues Played a Major Role as Well," *The Diplomat*, September 3, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/south-koreas-president-and-chinas-military-parade/>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Sang-Hun Choe, "South Korea to Shut Joint Factory Park, Kaesong, Over Nuclear Test and Rocket," *New York Times*, February 10, 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/11/world/asia/north-south-korea-kaesong.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/11/world/asia/north-south-korea-kaesong.html?_r=0).

nuclear, threat which also raised concerns from China. Nevertheless, in a surprise in late 2016, President Park faced enormous political backlash for corruption and incompetence, leading to her impeachment and eventual ouster in early 2017.<sup>63</sup> This unprecedented decision surprised not only the Korean people but also the entire world. In the presidential election held in mid-2017 to choose a successor, a progressive, Moon Jaein, was chosen to replace her.

### C. MEDIA EXPANSION AND ANTI-U.S. BASE SENTIMENT

With the South's democratic transition, freedom of expression undeniably improved. At the same time, unprofessional and biased media products among publishers, broadcast companies, and social networks, grew exponentially and influenced anti-U.S. military sentiment in the South. With the democratic transition and continuous high economic growth, media in the south also evolved and expanded. As Cooley points out, "Both President Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun [both progressives] complained about 'conservative' press bias and made media reform a central issue of their governments."<sup>64</sup> As a result, from 1998 onward, the *Hankyoreh* and *Kyunghyang* newspapers were empowered by the progressive government, enhancing the influence of mostly 386-generation journalists who often criticized the United States first without deep investigation or prudence.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the existing conservative newspaper published similar reports rather than counter-reports in order to remain competitive with their opponents. Straub argues, "Thus, reports about alleged crimes by American military personnel were typically prefaced by the phrase 'the ever-increasing,' and references to the U.S.–Korea SOFA [Status of Forces Agreement] were almost invariably preceded by the adjective 'unfair.'"<sup>66</sup> For this reason, more ordinary citizens came to believe the SOFA was an unfair and unequal system implemented by the United States only for its own interests instead of by mutual agreement.

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<sup>63</sup> Paula Hancocks and Euan McKirby, "South Korea: Court upholds President Park Geun-hye's impeachment: protests erupt," *CNN News*, March 10, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/09/asia/south-korea-park-geun-hye-impeachment-upheld/>.

<sup>64</sup> Cooley, *Base Politics*, 124.

<sup>65</sup> Straub, *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea*, 192.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

In addition, with the power of media, the increasingly biased media in the South engendered misperception of the U.S. military among the public. For example, this was occurring despite the fact that the number of USFK SOFA-applicable members' mishaps drastically dropped from thousands to three hundred over the past years.<sup>67</sup> For this reason, the live and repeated broadcast reports may have unduly influenced public opinion via its frequency and negative impact. According to a RAND research study, the South's newspapers increased their reports on the United States by 5 percent while reducing to 2 North Korea's share from 1990 to 2002.<sup>68</sup>

In addition, burgeoning Internet sites and easy access to unfiltered material contributed to the rise of anti-U.S. military sentiment in the South. The 386 and younger generations use the Internet heavily for news. RAND research shows that a majority of South Koreans get news from TV channels; however, those in their 20s get 17 percent of their news from the Internet while those in their 50s or older get only 0.5 percent this way.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, according to Straub, "Progressively inclined Koreans were ahead of conservatives in both producing and consuming news and commentary on the Internet. Koreans were also already using the Internet to mobilize protests and to get out the vote."<sup>70</sup> In 2002, activist groups and protesters used smartphones and the Internet to disseminate information and gather massive supporters nationwide when the U.S. armored vehicle incident occurred in the South. According to Cooley;

The progressive media's attention to crimes committed by USFK personnel has been particularly influential. Internet sites managed by activist groups and NGOs (such as [usacrime.org.kr](http://usacrime.org.kr) or [koreatruth.org](http://koreatruth.org)) post discussions and stories about the adverse effect of the USFK on Korean politics and society; they also link to other Websites and antibase campaigns.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Cooley, *Base Politics*, 123.

<sup>68</sup> Larson et al., *Ambivalent Allies?*, 113.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>70</sup> Straub, *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea*, 193.

<sup>71</sup> Cooley, *Base Politics*, 124.

At the same time, Internet sites often had no editorial function to filter raw materials, including inappropriate pictures and images, to readers. Moreover, President Roh Moo-hyun himself maximized the Internet during his presidential campaign to win the election. The *Rohsamo* (a group of pro-Roh Moo-hyun), for example, diligently supported Roh and promoted him for the president over the prominent candidate Lee Hyeon-chang in 2002. Unsurprisingly, the prevalent use of the Internet has amplified anti-U.S. military effects by quick sharing of information and massive nationwide mobilization.

On the other hand, the media's display and focus changed or even reversed when the conservative government retook office since 2008. Anti-U.S. military media products were significantly reduced during the administrations of pro-U.S. leaders Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye. Instead, the media has promoted the robust U.S.-ROK military alliance by displaying bilateral military exercises and VIP visits to Joint Bases in the country. According to a Freedom House report, South Korea's overall press status in 2002 was rated as "Free" during the progressive party government. The report explains, "Print and broadcast media offer vigorous, independent coverage including strong criticism of government politics and officials."<sup>72</sup> However, the ROK's rating degraded to "Partly Free" in 2011 under conservative rule. Conservative leader President Lee Myung-bak rigorously controlled the media, especially after the North's military provocations in 2010. The Freedom House explains that the government intentionally blocked pro-North and anti-South comments online.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, many journalists who criticized government policies and advocated for the freedom of press were also penalized under Lee's administration.<sup>74</sup> In addition, Freedom House highlights, "In 2010, more than 20 people were booked for making pro-North Korean comments, while over 40,000 pro-North Korean online posts were deleted by operators after pressure from police, more than 100 times the number of deletions five years ago."<sup>75</sup> The South's

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<sup>72</sup> "Freedom In The World: South Korea," Freedom House, accessed May 19, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2002/south-korea>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

overall press status today remains “Partly Free,” unchanged since its degradation in 2011. At the same time, media growth has been slowed in the South, and this seems to have enforced the procedure of uploading and displaying material for the public view.

In summary, media growth in the South evidently influenced and was used against the U.S. military presence in the country, especially during progressive party’s administrations. The increased number of progressive media outlets produced lopsided and biased material against the USFK to the general public. Moreover, prevalent Internet and smartphone usage among the 386 and younger generations boosted the anti-U.S. military sentiment by mobilizing massive people for protests and candlelight vigils during the early 2000s. Nevertheless, media growth after 2008 has plateaued and done less in regard to U.S. military presence in the South, chiefly due to the change from a progressive government to a conservative government more inclined to pro-U.S. expressions. Consequently, media play in the South has varied according to the fortunes of South Korea’s main political parties.

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### III. EXPLANATIONS FOR ANTI-BASE SENTIMENT: KOREAN NATIONALISM

The Korean people have survived hundreds of years despite much bigger and powerful neighbors' persistent harassment, invasions, and occupations in the region. According to Shin, the well-known historian Paek Namun argued, "The Korean nation is a unitary nation with a common blood, territory, language, culture, and historical destiny for thousands of years."<sup>76</sup> In the early 20th century, Imperial Japan, for example, occupied the Korean peninsula for 35 years from 1910 to 1945 despite strong opposition expressed by Koreans in various forms. Ultimately, Japan had no option but free the Korean peninsula after it unconditionally surrendered to the United States at the end of WWII.

During the Japanese occupation, Korean nationalism had ignited, grown nationwide and become stronger in spite of Japan's brutal repression. As a result, hundreds and thousands of Koreans came out in the streets to peacefully declared independence against the occupier Japanese on 1 March 1919.<sup>77</sup> According to Kim, "The March First Movement was unquestionably a nationalistic movement in which almost all the Koreans participated."<sup>78</sup> This nationalism, by and large, represented citizens of the same language, ethnicity, and historic narrative. For this reason, Korean nationalism can be reasonably traced back to the Chosun dynasty and King Sejong, credited for the creation of *Hangul* (Korean written characters) in the mid-1400s. The survival and longevity of the Chosun dynasty (approximately 1392 to 1910), despite being a small tiny country in the middle of hegemonic powers (China and Japan), might be taken as prominent evidence for that matter.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, King Sejong's creation of the Korean language (*Hangul*) replaced the Chinese, and, much later, a persistent independence

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<sup>76</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 5. Cited in Pang 1992, 124.

<sup>77</sup> Geoff Simons, *Korea: The Search for Sovereignty* (New York: St. Martine's Press, 1995), 133.

<sup>78</sup> Kuk-sung Suh et al., *The Identity of the Korean People: A History of Legitimacy on the Korean Peninsula* (Korea: National Unification Board, 1983), 51.

<sup>79</sup> Michael J. Seth, *A Concise History of Korea: From the Neolithic Period through the Nineteenth Century* (Lanhan, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2006), 121.

movement under the Japanese occupation exemplified strong and persistent nationalism among Koreans. According to Shin, Korea's reunification is a must and will happen due to its long history of homogeneity.<sup>80</sup> In addition, many South Koreans witnessed the peaceful unification of East and West Germany in 1989 and dreamed of such unity for the Korean peninsula thereafter. In addition, Eric Hobsbawm states, "nationalism is always linked to the rapid rise of an indigenous middle class and to the spread of literacy in the native language."<sup>81</sup>

In this chapter, this writer will analyze and describe why and how nationalism in South Korea has evolved, especially after its democratic transition in 1987, and affected anti-U.S. military base sentiment. Nationalism in the South gradually revived and grew with the democratic transition of the country. It reached its peak from 2000 to 2007 when the two Korea's leaders met and held summits in Pyongyang, North Korea. Nevertheless, Korean nationalism in the South weakened when conservative party governments retook office in 2008 and North Korea ostensibly provoked the South in various forms. Prior to democratization, nationalism has been suppressed under prevalent ideologies of democracy and capitalism in the South in spite of its vibrant movement shortly after the liberation from Japanese colonization in 1945. Once again, until 1987, soft authoritarian governments strongly repressed the nationalist movement in the South, especially after the Korean War. The government harshly charged many opposition movements such as student activists, dissident intellectuals, and labor groups for undermining national security and violating the National Security Law. Accordingly, the government imprisoned many of them during this period. An anti-communist assassinated Kim Gu, a prominent nationalist leader in the South, for example, during the turmoil of the divided Korea in 1949. Nevertheless, since 1987, pro-nationalist ideas and approaches from top governments, especially during progressive leadership, had spurred nationalism and eventually influenced anti-U.S. military base sentiment in the South. Korean nationalism,

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<sup>80</sup> Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 183.

<sup>81</sup> Patrick H. O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski, *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, 4th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 75.



specifically founded in one bloodline of “homogeneity,” often rejects foreign nationals’ presence and influence.

#### **A. EMERGENCE OF NATIONALISM AFTER 1987**

Why was nationalism inactive in the South prior to 1987 despite its strong presence during and after the Japanese colonial period? It is critical to examine how Korean nationalism has emerged in the South since 1987. Not surprisingly, prior to democratization, soft authoritarian regimes strictly repressed nationalism in the South. Principally, the authoritarian leaders perceived that it had been intertwined with communist ideology rather than democracy. According to Gi-Wook Shin, nationalism is the most universal and easily merges with other ideologies such as Marxism and Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>82</sup> South Korean governments perceived Communist ideology to be extremely dangerous and put the country’s national security at a high risk. The Korean War in 1950 initiated by the communist North, for example, left enormous damage and national security challenges for the South; thus, any movement against its government was perceived a threat to domestic stability and that must be repressed.

Brad Glosserman and Scott Snyder point out, “The primary divisions over identity and nationalism have historically occurred between conservatives and progressives. The divisions have antecedents that go back to the Korean colonial period, although they were masked under Korea’s conservative authoritarian leaders, who tended to oppress progressive tendencies as pro-North Korea.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, Communist was malicious and detrimental to regime survival and maintaining peace and stability while the North watches more aggressively to unify the South. This logic and conception may have appealed to the South’s conservative leaders prior to 1987, especially after the communist aggressors had already demonstrated a vicious ambition to take over the South by force in 1950. Gi-Wook Shin argues that “Antigovernment forces or pro-democracy forces, which were often identical, were portrayed a pro-Communist and therefore antination, and they

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<sup>82</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, “South Korean Anti-Americanism: A Comparative Perspective,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 36, no. 8 (August 1996), 791.

<sup>83</sup> Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 63.

were severely repressed.”<sup>84</sup> South’s soft authoritarian regimes strongly repressed not only pro-communist but also pro-democracy whomever opposes their policies.

In addition, reviving the Kwangju massacre significantly boosted anti-U.S. sentiment. Gi-Wook Shin points out, “The turning point in the development of anti-American *minjung* nationalism was the massacre [that] took place during the 1980 Kwangju uprisings.”<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, nationalism in the South gradually changed after 1987 chiefly because of its democratization kick-off had loosened the freedom of expression and the government was much more tolerant and open to new ideas. With democratization, nationalism in the South has steadily grown among its populace and political leaders. Dong Sun Lee claims, “South Korea’s democratization allowed nationalists to acquire significant political influence.”<sup>86</sup>

Moreover, Korean nationalism rose remarkably during the progressive presidencies from 1998 to 2008. President Kim Daejung and his successor President Roh Moohyun promoted and emboldened the nationalist sensation by opening dialogue with the North leader, Kim Jongil and had two summits in 2000 and 2007 respectively. These events were a historical climax for the two nationalist leaders. Furthermore, the South continued its unconditional engagement policy, the so-called the “Sunshine Policy,” with the North, while the U.S. government took a different, hardline approach towards the North. In this context, the two Koreas’ growing nationalism has caused political friction in the U.S.–ROK relations, particularly the U.S. military presence.

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<sup>84</sup> Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 168.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>86</sup> Dong Sun Lee, “Democratization and the US-South Korea Alliance,” *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol.7, no. 3 (September 2007): 475.

## B. NATIONALISM'S INFLUENCE IN ANTI-U.S. BASE SENTIMENT

Growing nationalism in a homogeneous ethnic society has intrinsically affected anti-U.S. military base sentiment in the South. Korean nationalism, which united one ethnicity (*Hanminjok*) with, shared a single bloodline of “homogeneity.”<sup>87</sup> This conceptual belief often accompanied a rejection of foreigners’ presence and influence in the country. The salient nationalist leaders, chiefly President Kim Daejung and President Roh Moohyun, viewed the U.S. military presence in the South as an obstacle for the autonomy and reunification of the divided countries. Thus, pro-nationalist leaders viewed much like North Korean counterparts that the U.S. military presence in the South was troublesome for an inter-Korea relationship. Because of this nationalistic view, the U.S. military presence in the South has encountered strong opposition from nationalist activists and pro-North groups.

The two Korea’s leaders—Kim Daejung and Kim Jongil—summit in 2000 reached the unprecedented level of nationalism. According to the U.S. Department of State poll in 2000, South Korean favored the United States 71 percent before the summit; however, favor dropped to only 58 percent after the summit.<sup>88</sup>

In addition, President Roh Moohyun was also one of the prominent pro-nationalists who used the U.S. protest to his own advantage to win the presidential election in 2002. Unlike other politicians in the South, he never visited the United States and openly criticized the U.S. during the election campaign. According to Yuko Kawato, Roh said during the campaign, “If elected, I will deal with the Bush administration with national assertiveness. I will not kowtow to Washington.”<sup>89</sup> Eventually, his words and support of anti-U.S. sentiments satisfied the many protesters on the streets and helped him win the presidential election in a surprise. With his nationalist approach, President Roh had pursued a self-determining military that resulted in drawing up an agreement for

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<sup>87</sup> Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 152.

<sup>88</sup> Larson et al., *Ambivalent Allies?*, 108.

<sup>89</sup> Kawato, *Protests Against U.S. Military Base Policy in Asia*, 115.

the “implementation of SOFA”<sup>90</sup> in 2003 and the Operational Control transfer to ROKJCS from the USFK in 2006 which has been delayed to the present day.

Table 2 reveals two drastic changes vis-à-vis the United States and North Korea in South’s public opinion in 2001 and 2003 respectively. First, the dislike country poll on North Korea significantly reduced from 22.3 in 1996 to 10.8 in 2001 after the inter-Korean summit held in the previous year, 2000. Second, the dislike country poll on the United States drastically rose from 7.0 in 2001 to 23.7 in 2003 after the U.S. policy change (specifically referring the North as the “Axis of Evil”) towards the North. Ultimately, South’s pro-nationalist governments’ unconditional engagement and rapprochement to the North often conflicted with the U.S. government’s hardline policy.

Table 2. RAND Research on South Korea’s Disliked Countries<sup>91</sup>

Countries Most Disliked by South Koreans, 1994–2003

	Gallup Korea 12/ 94	<i>JoongAng Ilbo</i> * 8/ 96	<i>JoongAng Ilbo</i> 9/ 01	<i>JoongAng Ilbo</i> - CSIS 9/ 03
Japan	47.6	51.4	63.4	25.6
North Korea	16.8	22.3	10.8	12.7
U.S.	6.1	7.0	7.0	23.7
Russia	2.1		0.8	
Switzerland		3.9		
Australia		2.4		
China			2.8	

NOTE: For details of question wording and other features, see Baik and Larson (forthcoming).

Prevalent nationalism among the young generation, including the 386 generation, has boosted anti-U.S. military sentiment in the South. People have varying degrees of nationalism in South Korea, with variation among demographic groups. Most

<sup>90</sup> Kawato, *Protests Against U.S. Military Base Policy in Asia*, 116.

<sup>91</sup> Source: Larson et al., *Ambivalent Allies?*, 62.

straightforwardly, nationalism has divided younger and older generations. Nationalism is more prevalent among baby boomers and young generations who were born after the Korean War in 1950. These citizens are better educated and self-confident in comparison to their parents and grandparents, due to the country's growing economy and improved education system. These same people, by and large, accumulated confidence and pride through the country's capabilities and accomplishments such as its miraculous economic growth since the Korean War, the 1988 Seoul Olympics, membership in the OECD in 1992, and the 2002 World Cup that ended with a surprisingly satisfactory result. Shin argues, "The younger generation in South Korea is eager to free the peninsula from centuries of foreign domination."<sup>92</sup> The massive protest led by young people against the U.S. military after the armored vehicle accident in 2002 was a testament to rising nationalism among the young generation at that time. Furthermore, the 386 and younger generations have moved up to key positions in politics, business, and society while the number of older citizens is diminishing.

Older generations who directly experienced the Korean War are less nationalist than the younger generations, more pro-U.S., and in turn more likely to be true believers in an unwavering U.S. and ROK alliance. For this generation, the United States is a big brother and savior from imperial Japan and communist aggressors. Thus, even today, many elderly citizens in the South express wholehearted gratitude to the United States for its noble deeds during the Korean War and its generous economic assistance after the war destruction. At the same time, these people gradually vanish from many key positions in politics, businesses, and society.

Nevertheless, Korean nationalism gradually decreased after 2008. As discussed in chapter 2, the South elected conservative leaders; Presidents Lee Myongbak and Park Geunhye in 2007 and 2012 respectively. Unlike the previous two presidents, these two have not tolerated the North, and instead they were in line with the U.S. policy of a hard line towards the North. In addition, South Koreans witnessed the North's aggressions in 2010, when it killed its own kinship by torpedoing a Navy patrol vessel and shelling the

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<sup>92</sup> Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 179.

border-area island, YP-Do. These sudden provocations changed many South Koreans' perceptions of the North from *hanminjok* to one of a hostile enemy.

### C. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, authoritarian governments viewed South Korean nationalism was often as pro-communist and anti-government thus repressed it. Nevertheless, the unleashed latent nationalism in the South after its democratic transition in 1987 has, in part, negatively affected anti-U.S. military base sentiment despite the U.S. military role in maintaining peace and stability in the Korean peninsula. The pro-North government under the single bloodline context in the South conflicted with the U.S. interest (hardline/tough) towards the North, especially during the period of progressive government in the South. The pro-nationalist presidents—President Kim Daejung and President Roh Moohyun—sought a rapprochement with its brethren North known as the “Sunshine” policy and held historical summits in 2000 and 2007 respectively during their presidencies. At the same time, growing and prevalent nationalism among the 386 and young generations have worked against the U.S. military presence in the South. The massive protest against the U.S. military after the armored vehicle accident in 2002 marked a generational change and expression of nationalism among the younger generation.

Nevertheless, with the conservative governments' retake in office since 2008 and the North's aggressions in 2010, killing its own kinship by torpedoing the Navy patrol vessel and shelling the YP-Do affected lowering Korean nationalism. These sudden provocations changed many South Koreans' perceptions of the North from *hanminjok* to the hostile enemy. The South's growing nationalism has arguably elevated anti-U.S. military sentiment in the early 2000s. However, this sentiment dropped when the conservative party retook office in 2008 and the North military provoked the South more than once in 2010 and continuous missile and nuclear tests. Its sharp resurrection in the short term would be most unlikely in the South, especially with the North's brinkmanship in a nuclear threat and a strong U.S.–ROK alliance.

## **IV. OTHER FACTORS SHAPING ANTI-U.S. PROTEST**

Since 1987, besides democratic transition and Korean nationalism, other factors also arguably influenced anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea. These have been the USFK military role and activities in the South, non-base incidents including international social events, international diplomatic relationships, generation gap in society, and economic growth and globalization. All these factors cause some degree, more or less, to anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South to fluctuate.

### **A. USFK MEMBERS' MISHAPS AND SECURITY THREAT LEVEL**

The U.S. military activities and security posture (or threat level) in the South have arguably affected anti-U.S. base sentiment in opposite ways. First, the persistent USFK military members' mishaps on and off duty have negatively contributed to anti-U.S. military sentiment in the South, especially in the early 2000s. Nonetheless, the U.S. military mishaps were seldom publicized and available to ordinary citizens until 1987, primarily because of authoritarian governments' rigorous control.

More often than not, the USFK members' mishaps in the South compromise military relations and boost anti-U.S. military sentiment. The armored vehicle incident in 2002, for example, quickly elevated anti-U.S. military base sentiment with massive gatherings and protests nationwide. The USFK military members' training mishaps and off base crimes always make top national news, regardless of their categories, scales, and circumstance. Thus, they negatively affect anti-U.S. military sentiment as they would any place where countries host the U.S. military force.

Following are several well-known mishaps that most negatively affected the U.S. military in South Korea after democratization. In 2000, the U.S. Army Garrison (USAG) Yongsan in Seoul was accused of dumping toxic liquids through sewage that eventually merged with the Han River. This spillage ignited environmental groups, activists, and supporters to protest against the U.S. military and portrayed the U.S. military installations

in the South as a serious environmental problem for the country.<sup>93</sup> A U.S. airplane dropped six live bombs near a firing range as an emergency measure, injuring thirteen residents and provoking miscarriage by 42 cows nearby.<sup>94</sup> In an off duty incident around the same time, a U.S. military member was accused of killing an innocent college student at a fast food restaurant in Itawon. Furthermore, the U.S. armored vehicle accident occurred amid the 2002 World Cup soccer game co-hosted by the South and Japan. According to Kawato, “a fifty-six ton American military armored vehicle accidentally ran over and killed two fourteen-year-old girls on a narrow stretch of road in Kyonggi Province during a military exercise.”<sup>95</sup> The delayed and ambiguous response by the USFK Commander at the time further inflamed South Koreans and brought massive protests and rallies to the streets in Seoul and elsewhere in the South. At the same time, the gatherings for the 2002 World Cup soccer tournament in the South perhaps facilitated record-breaking anti-American protests, including massive candlelight vigils in front of Seoul City Hall. Interestingly, the number of U.S. military members’ mishaps had drastically declined in 2002 compared to the past.<sup>96</sup> Not surprisingly, though, persistent USFK members’ mishaps, regardless of their size and scale, boosted anti-U.S. military base sentiment and ultimately dampened U.S.–ROK relations, even though the frequency of the mishaps had been significantly reduced from the past.

Another military activity that triggered the anti-U.S. military base movement in the South was the base relocation plan of 2006. The heavy concentration of U.S. military bases in the center of Seoul, South Korea’s biggest city, often created friction between the two governments. The USAG Yongsan was located in the heart of its capital city, and the U.S. military had taken it over from Imperial Japan after WWII. As Calder points out, “Democratic countries where American bases are concentrated in heavily populated areas also tend, as a general matter, to be countries where antibase protest is vigorous.”<sup>97</sup> He

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<sup>93</sup> Kawato, *Protests Against U.S. Military Base Policy in Asia*, 110.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>96</sup> Cooley, *Base Politics*, 122.

<sup>97</sup> Kent E. Calder, *Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 85.



also uses South Korea as an exemplary case in this matter.<sup>98</sup> For this reason, the United States and ROK governments agreed to relocate the bases from Seoul and its vicinity to further south, Pyeongtaek city, to reduce friction. However, the local populace in Pyeongtaek, supported by NGOs and interest groups, strongly opposed the plan and vigorously protested against both governments, as primarily a NIMBY (not in my back yard) effort. Many agree that the U.S. military presence in the South is critical for deterrence of the North's aggression but do not want it nearby for reasons such as loud noises or simply no desire to give up their properties.

## **B. NON-BASE INCIDENTS**

Various non-base related incidents from the domestic and international domains have been also incorporated into anti-U.S. base sentiment. The following introduces particularly well known incidents. In 1995, Washington's unilateral actions towards the North engendered anti-U.S. sentiment in the South. The Clinton administration often excluded the South when it dealt with the North's nuclear disarmament. A RAND research group states, "Not surprisingly, the June 1995 U.S.–North Korean Kuala Lumpur agreement on implementation of the October 1994 Agreed Framework was viewed by many South Koreans as having ignored and excluded Seoul from another key agreement with the north on the nuclear issue, and led to reactions that generally ranged between irritation and anger at the U.S."<sup>99</sup> It also states that this perceived U.S. image of thoughtlessness caused a sharp downturn in U.S.–ROK relationship.<sup>100</sup>

In 2001, the newly elected U.S. President George W. Bush and the September 11 terrorist attack in the United States influenced anti-U.S. military sentiment in the South. The Bush administration viewed the North much differently than that of the South. South's President Kim Daejung pursued an engagement policy with the North while the United States drew a hardline. These two governments' differences in dealings towards

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<sup>98</sup> Calder, *Embattled Garrisons*, 85.

<sup>99</sup> Larson et al., *Ambivalent Allies?*, 74.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 73.

the North created misunderstanding and disunity that eventually stroked anti-U.S. protests in the South.

In 2002, an international sports event suddenly raised anti-U.S. sentiment. In the 2002 Winter Olympics held in Salt Lake City, Utah, the disqualification of Korean short track skater Kim Dongsung, whose first-place finish was relinquished instead to the U.S. skater, Apolo Ohno, infuriated South Koreans for its perceived unfairness.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, given historical issues and sensitivity between the South and Japan, that it was a Japanese-American skater who took Kim's place extraordinarily inflamed many South Koreans, especially among the young generation more prone to nationalism at the time. According to RAND, "this incident appears to be largely responsible for the decline in favorable sentiment toward the U.S. at the time."<sup>102</sup> For the Koreans, historic baggage and grievances from Japanese colonial times had apparently added to the sharp decline.

In 2002, the popular American late night talk show host, Jay Leno, imprudently remarked on the incident, joking that Kim Dongsung returned home so angry and "he kicked the dog and ate it."<sup>103</sup> Prominent newspapers and massive numbers of "netizens" criticized Leno's racist and derogatory comment, and arguably worsened anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South, especially among the young generation.

In 2003, the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) TV program PD notebook raised concerns about U.S. beef imports by discussing mad cow disease in the U.S. and publicly promoting banning U.S. beef products as unsafe. The South was the third largest American beef consumer at the time. Massive protests emerged from farmers and like-minded citizens nationwide. As a result, the South's progressive government banned U.S. beef imports and hurt U.S.-ROK relations further. In 2008, almost five years later, newly elected President Lee Myongbak lifted the U.S. beef ban.

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<sup>101</sup> Larson et al., *Ambivalent Allies?*, 74.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Don Kirk, "American on thin ice in South Korea," *New York Times*, March 1, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/01/news/america-on-thin-ice-in-south-korea.html>.

In 2007, U.S.–ROK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) initiation talks also boosted anti-U.S. sentiment in the South. As with U.S. beef imports, many South Koreans, especially farmers and factory workers, disagreed with the two governments' decision on the FTA. They perceived it as unfair and disadvantageous to their position. Approximately 110,000 metal union workers in 157 locations organized strikes against the FTA negotiation.<sup>104</sup>

Such bits and pieces of perceived mistrust against the U.S. from various domains accumulated to greater levels of mistrust towards the USFK in the South and eventually erupted during the early 2000s. Nonetheless, this perception of mistrust has not persisted indefinitely in the South. With a changing political and economic environment, the number of clashes between the U.S. and South Korea has significantly declined, especially after conservative leaders took office in 2008.

### **C. THREAT PERCEPTION AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

The U.S.–ROK relations conspicuously reflected anti-U.S. military sentiment in the South. Since the Korean War, the North always posed a great threat to South Korea. Thus, the U.S. and ROK military have built an indispensable alliance to deter the North's provocation. By and large, the relationship strength has been fairly strong and steady, but with notable exceptions during a few presidencies.

Since 1948, the U.S. and ROK built a strong relationship that led to alliances, especially after the Korean War in 1950. The U.S. was portrayed in the South as a big brother and savior from not only the Japanese imperialists but also from communist aggressors. However, this staunch alliance between the two countries withered as the North's threat diminished, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Nevertheless, the U.S.–ROK relationship had been strained and weakened from the late 1990s to the early 2000s mainly due to a changing international and domestic environment.

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<sup>104</sup> Sunny Lim, "Korean Unionists Protest Free Trade Agreement with U.S." *The Labor Notes*, July 30, 2007, <http://www.labornotes.org/2007/07/korean-unionists-protest-free-trade-agreement-us?language=en>.

Internationally, the 911 terrorist attacks in 2001 led the U.S. government to declare the War on Terror also known as the Global War on Terrorism and identified North Korea as the “Axis of evil,” among other countries in the Middle East.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, Washington pressured the South to participate Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) while it was facing the North’s threat. With regard to North Korea itself, the US-ROK relationship grew strained due to differing threat perceptions. The Koreans perceived the North as non-threat whereas the U.S. called it the “Axis of evil.” Domestically, the South’s Progressive leaders pursued a rapprochement with the North to normalize their stranded relations. Hence, Washington and Seoul encountered friction over the North.

With a prominent change in politics in 1998, the Kim Daejung progressive government reached out to the North and pursued a rapprochement with the North. As a result, Seoul dramatically reversed its prolonged adversarial relationship with Pyongyang. The Kim administration’s “Sunshine” policy, combined with a Pyongyang summit of both Korea’s leaders in 2000 for the first time since the peninsula’s split in 1948, quickly thawed their protracted frozen relationship. The two sides agreed to cooperate in various areas: to reunify families separated during the Korean War from 1950 to 1953, enter the 2000 Summer Olympics under one unified flag, increase economic trade and development, and open the door for tourism between the two Korea’s. They established the Kaesong Joint Industrial Complex near the western end of the DMZ and opened Kumkang Mountain Tourism, which were argued to be mutually beneficial for both Korea’s. For the first time, vigorous political and economic exchanges coupled with peaceful and humane activities between the two Korea’s altered the public’s view on security. Public opinion came to perceive the North as posing no prominent threat despite its consistent missile and nuclear weapon development, and to perceive the U.S. as more belligerent than the North. For this reason, some South Korean citizens, even today, are questioning the U.S. military presence and its role in the country. Yeo argues, “Anti-base

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<sup>105</sup> “President Bush’s first State of the Union Address,” The White House, accessed April 7, 2017, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

movements were more effective under conditions of weak security consensus.”<sup>106</sup> From the South Korean perspective, U.S. bases become less credible as the main security threat from North Korea diminishes. Thus, U.S. bases become more vulnerable to anti-U.S. movements, especially if combined with any crimes or accidents by U.S. military members in the South.

From 2008 onward, the U.S.–ROK relationship has been amicable and strong again, as the North’s provocation often reduces the anti-U.S. military sentiment. In addition to the 2010 provocations noted previously, in 2015, the North was accused of planting land mines that injured two ROK soldiers on patrol duty near the DMZ.<sup>107</sup> These incidents further elevated tensions and pushed the two Koreas to the brink of war. Furthermore, the North has consistently tested its multi range missiles and demonstrated nuclear ambition. In 2016, the North unprecedentedly carried out back-to-back nuclear weapon tests in January and September in addition to a long-range rocket test in February. These activities have initiated an arms race in the Korean peninsula, including deployment of the U.S. THAAD system in the South to counteract the North’s missile threat. The North’s brinkmanship and military aggression have undeniably changed many South Koreans’ views of the North, lessened anti-U.S. military sentiment, and enhanced the U.S.–ROK alliance.

It should be noted that U.S.–DPRK relations themselves, to the extent these can be separated from the ROK threat issue, has been always quite bad to strain. The U.S. and DPRK relationship worsened immediately after the Korean War in 1950. Relations grew worse over time because of consistent provocation from the North, including the USS Pueblo kidnapping in 1968 and the Panmunjom incident in 1976 that killed two U.S.

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<sup>106</sup> Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, And Anti-U.S. Base Protests*, 33.

<sup>107</sup> Sang-Hun Choe, “South Korea Accuses the North After Land Mines Maim Two Soldiers in DMZ” *New York Times*, August 10, 2015, [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/11/world/asia/north-korea-placed-mines-that-maimed-2-south-korean-soldiers-at-dmz-seoul-says.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/11/world/asia/north-korea-placed-mines-that-maimed-2-south-korean-soldiers-at-dmz-seoul-says.html?_r=0).

military members.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, decades of unsuccessful nuclear non-proliferation efforts have chilled relations insofar. Fundamentally, U.S.–DPRK relations have been frustrated and never improved since the war in 1950.

Good relations between the ROK and China may also have an indirect protest-facilitating effect similar to low perceptions of Northern threat. Sino-Korea relations go back centuries, but modern hostile relations between China and South Korea began with the Korean War. The South recognized and built an amicable relationship with Taiwan as many other western countries did after WWII. Meanwhile, the Sino-ROK relations faced several crises. In the 1980s, a hijacked Chinese airline landed in Chuncheon, South Korea in an emergency, and a Chinese torpedo boat drifted into the South's maritime territory. These two inter-country crises inevitably brought the two governments to establish unofficial diplomatic channels to resolve the issues.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, Sino-ROK relations rapidly improved over mutual economic interests, especially after the establishment of diplomatic relations. The end of the Cold War created an opportunity for the South to normalize its relations with former communist countries such as Russia, Eastern Europe, and China. Thus, the South normalized its relationship with Russia and China in 1991 and 1992 respectively. The relationship was improved after the AFC severely hampered the South's economy. China kept its currency intact instead of devaluating its currency to make the situation worse in the South.<sup>110</sup> The South appreciated China's benign action. In 2004, for example, trades and exchanges between the South and China surpassed that with the U.S. and kept China the South's number one trade partner. In addition, the South and China have a common interest in keeping peace and stability in the Korean peninsula in order to maintain economic prosperity. The relationship crumbled when the North's

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<sup>108</sup> In 1968, North Korea captured USS Pueblo which was operating in Sea of Japan/East Sea. North Korea accused the U.S. vessel for encroaching its water territory. All 83 U.S. Navy personnel held for hostage and released after almost a year in prison camp. This incident sharply elevated tensions between the two countries at the time. In 1976, North Korean soldiers attacked the U.S. soldiers who were working a tree cutting at Panmunjom Joint Security Area near the DMZ. As a result, North Korean soldiers killed two U.S. Army Officers with axes. This axe incident infuriated the U.S. government and quickly escalated tensions.

<sup>109</sup> Scott Snyder, *China's Rise and The Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 29.

<sup>110</sup> Snyder, *China's Rise and The Two Koreas*, 57.

military provoked the South twice in 2010. Many South Koreans criticized the Chinese government for an ambiguous reaction. In 2016, making matters worse, the CCP strongly condemned the South for agreeing to deploy the U.S. THAAD system in its territory and failed to condemn the North.

#### **D. GENERATION GAP IN SOCIETY**

Rapidly growing civil society groups and generational cleavages have hugely affected anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea. Since 1987, these groups and organizations have exponentially grown in the South.<sup>111</sup> These civil groups more often than not became the vanguard of demonstrations against the U.S. military in broad areas.

The generation gap between young and old also has influenced anti-U.S. base sentiment. Traditionally, the Korean War generation staunchly supports the U.S. military in South Korea. However, this generation has slowly aged and faded away, becoming less influential in broad areas. To the contrary, the post Korean War generation, whose views toward the U.S. military are less favorable than those of their fathers, have flourished and become more influential in broad areas of politics, business, the military, and society. As result, the new generation has a greater tendency to resist the U.S. military.

Table 3 reflects prominent generation gaps in respect to the U.S. in South Korea in 2002. The survey on the U.S. shows that 41.4 percent of the younger generation (20-29 years) replied very unfavorable while 16.9 percent of the older generation (50+ years) replied very unfavorable. At the same time, only 4.8 percent very favored from the same younger generation while 18.6 percent from the same older generation. These results clearly represent the generation gap in the South specifically during the peak of anti-U.S. sentiment in the early 2000s.

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<sup>111</sup> Straub, *Anti-Americanism in Democratizing South Korea*, 190.

Table 3. A Gallup Korea Survey on the U.S. Sentiment<sup>112</sup>

Favorable and Unfavorable Sentiment Toward the United States, February 2002						
Overall, do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of the U.S.? (Gallup Korea, 2/26/02, Adults aged 20 and older, N=1,032)						
	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	DK / Refused	Sample size
Total Sample	9.2%	24.4%	29.0%	30.6%	6.7%	1,032
By Age Group						
20-29 yrs	4.8%	18.3%	28.8%	41.4%	6.7%	261
30-39 yrs	2.2	19.0	38.4	35.6	4.8	275
40-49 yrs	11.1	29.8	26.0	29.4	3.7	208
50+ yrs	18.6	31.4	22.5	16.9	10.6	288
By Education						
Jr. high/under	19.8%	32.2%	19.5%	13.8%	14.7%	216
HS graduates	8.1	21.3	32.0	32.8	5.9	369
College/upper	5.1	23.3	31.2	37.0	3.5	447
College Students	0.0%	0.0%	40.7%	59.3%	0.0%	7

Source: Gallup Korea Ltd., <http://panel.gallup.co.kr>.

## E. ECONOMIC GROWTH

The South's miraculous economic growth has partially affected anti-U.S. military base sentiment. South Korea's growth was planned and led by its government – the so-called “developmental state.” The Korean government consistently shared its income and profits from economic growth with the general public, and this benefited the entire populace, helping it inherit and afford a better education and quality of life. Moreover, the South had continuously pursued and established high-quality education systems and encouraged citizens to get the best education possible. For this reason, many South Koreans have rapidly expanded their knowledge in broad areas and been exposed to new or different ideas through education. RAND research reveals that as young South Koreans increase their education levels, they become more inclined to be unfavorable

<sup>112</sup> Adapted from Larson et al., *Ambivalent Allies?*, 75.



toward the U.S.<sup>113</sup> In addition, the number of Korean students and scholars who attend schools abroad exponentially increased as the economic boom continued in the South. Among the foreign travelers, many would have empirically experienced and changed their views toward the United States. A massive number of South Koreans traveled to China after the two countries' normalization in 1992. In the early 2000s, many South Koreans perceived China as a good neighbor and a lucrative trade partner; thus, it favored China more than other neighboring countries. For this reason, in China, for example, since the 1989 uprising in Beijing, a strong nationalist rhetoric and propaganda have rejected foreign influence, especially that of Western states. This may have subconsciously affected travelers from South Korea.

Globalization has promoted freer societies and demanded greater equality for the South; this may have led to anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South. With globalization, South Koreans had had opportunities to broaden their views by observing other countries and then adopting best solutions. Civil groups, for example, brought up the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) revision in the South, after these had engaged with transnational activists and observed other countries' positions.<sup>114</sup>

Furthermore, many South Korean business firms have competed with global firms and achieved success in different areas. Samsung and Hyundai, for example, became world-class corporations in the production of electronics and automobiles. For these reasons, South Koreans rightfully accumulated great self-confidence and pride. As a result, they began to gain more confidence and demand more equal treatment rather than a patron-client position with the U.S. in broad areas. For example, many South Koreans believed the SOFA to be an unfair agreement between a strong and a weak country. Therefore, unlike past decades, the South demanded to revise the SOFA in the late 1990s when its economic growth was very strong.

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<sup>113</sup> Larson et al., *Ambivalent Allies?*, 95.

<sup>114</sup> Cooley, *Base Politics*, 121.

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## V. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, two important aspects (findings and implications) will be outlined and correlated to match findings to implications or vice versa and followed by this thesis conclusion. Findings are derived from factual and rigorous assessment while implications will explain potential problems and issues with anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South today and in the future. Main conclusion from this thesis is anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea fluctuate with Korea domestic administrations (primarily partisan between progressive and conservative), North Korea threat level, and the U.S. posture.

### A. FINDINGS

What factors have caused or are causing anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South to fluctuate?

#### **Progressive presidents**

- The anti-U.S. military base sentiment in the South soared and reached record-height during the progressive party leaders' (President Kim Daejung and President Roh Moo Hyun) presidencies from 1998 to 2007. Both progressive presidents, more than others, advocated self-reliance on its defense posture.<sup>115</sup>
- The Pew Research data reveals less favorable attitudes toward the U.S. during this time, see Figure 1. More specifically, in 2003, the opinion poll rated 46 percent favorable toward the U.S., which marked the lowest favorable percentage since its recording in South Korea, so far. Conversely, this same opinion poll reflects gradual improvement as the conservative party leaders became president. The favorable U.S. rating soared to 70 percent in 2007 as the conservative party leader President Lee Myongbak took office, and it reached 84 percent in 2015 during another conservative party leader President Park's tenure.
- In 2016, President Park (a conservative leader) faced bribery and corruption charges and ultimately relieved of her office upon being impeached by the left-dominated Congress and Constitutional Court.
- On 9 May 2017, South Korea elected the progressive party leader, Moon Jaein as the new President.

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<sup>115</sup> Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, And Anti-U.S. Base Protests*, 127.

### **Democratization level**

- Since 1987, democratization in South Korea gradually improved especially under the progressive party leaders. In 2005, the South improved its overall freedom rating (1=best, 7=worst) from 2 to 1.5 in accordance with the Freedom House's standard. Nevertheless, it reversed to 2 during Park's administration in 2013.

### **Nationalism level**

- Korean nationalism had its resurgence in South Korea after the democratic transition in 1987.
- President Kim Daejung pursued a diplomatic rapprochement in the North and set the "Sunshine Policy."
- In 2000, first time since the split, the two Korean leaders (Kim Daejung and Kim Jongil) held a summit in Pyeongyang, North Korea.
- In 2006, Roh Moohyun and Kim Jongil held the second inter-Korea summit in same place. Nevertheless, these summits and interactivities did not bring national reunification for Korea.

### **USFK mishap level**

- The USFK members' mishap indeed persists in the South since its establishment.
- In 2002, anti-U.S. Base sentiment spiked especially with the U.S. armored vehicle incident that killed two schoolgirls on Highway 56. At the same time, the frequency of USFK members' mishaps in the South significantly dropped from its first recording from three digits to two digits.
- Consequently, the circumstance or arguably the attitude of the USFK leadership towards the mishap in 2002 weighed heavier than the frequency of mishaps.

### **Non-base incident level**

- Non-base incident undeniably influences anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South. It also accumulates and sharply raises anti-American sentiment as demonstrated during the Winter Olympics in 2002, mad cow disease in 2003, and the US-ROK FTA in 2008.
- Peaceful protesters often pursue demonstrations around the U.S. facilities including U.S. bases to maximize their effort.

### **DPRK threat level**

- The DPRK threat level causes fluctuation in anti-U.S. military base sentiment. The anti-U.S. base sentiment rated fairly high when the DPRK threat ranked low during 1998–2007. On the other hand, in 2010, the DPRK threat level was escalated by sinking South's Cheonan patrol vessel and shelling artillery on YP-Do.
- In 2016, the DPRK conducted its fifth nuclear weapon test followed by various range of missile test. Thus, the U.S. and ROK governments agreed to deploy the THAAD system in the South to increase defensive posture.

### **Generation gap level**

- A generation gap between young and old exists in the South and causes a sharp rise in anti-U.S. base sentiment especially among the younger generation.
- The generation gap remains unchanged because of chiefly different generational experiences toward the U.S. between younger and older generations. The older generation who had experienced the Korean War has true believers and loyalists to the U.S. However, the younger generation who were born after the Korean War has fewer believers who are more skeptical towards the U.S. At the same time, the younger generation has received a high education from both domestic and abroad education systems.
- The younger generation is often proud for the country's achievement and strongly demands an equal and fair treatment from the United States.

### **Economic growth**

- South Korea's miraculous economic growth contributed to anti-U.S. base sentiment because chiefly it increased its confidence and reduced reliance on the United States. However, the economic growth has been consistently slowed and steady.
- South Korea became a member of the OECD in 1996.
- The South's main economic trade partner has changed from the U.S. to China since 2004.
- The USROK FTA was codified in 2012 and it is under effect. Nonetheless, the U.S. new administration reconsiders revising or terminating the bilateral FTA.

### **Media growth**

- Media growth undeniably influenced anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South.
- Both main political parties (Progressive and Conservative) use it for their own advantages.
- The Conservative party has more rigorously controlled the media when dealing with U.S. military affairs; whereas, the progressive party has highlighted or less rigorously controlled the same matter. The media growth has slowed in the South mainly due to its wide access. At the same time, the Freedom House survey data on South's media currently reflects as "partly free." It has been unchanged since its recording in 1998.
- In addition, the young generation outweighs the old generation on media usage, especially Internet, smart phones, and social media.

### **Relationship strength with the U.S., China, and U.S.–DPRK**

- South Korea's diplomatic relationships with the U.S. and China affected anti-U.S. base sentiment. The U.S.–ROK relations began after WWII.
- Anti-U.S. base sentiment decreased when the U.S.–ROK relations were strong; however, it increased when the U.S.–ROK relations were weak or even contentious during the early 2000s.
- In addition, the Sino–ROK relationship also influenced anti-U.S. base sentiment to fluctuate; however, it has been less influenced than that of the U.S.–ROK relationship. Moreover, the Sino-ROK relationships have largely depended on mutual economic growth.
- The U.S.–DPRK relationship has minimum impact on anti-U.S. base sentiment mainly due to a persistent unfavorable relationship between the two countries since WWII. The U.S. and North Korea never established diplomatic relations.
- In 2008, the U.S. and other members indefinitely suspended the "Six Party Talks" with the North, which was a part of multilateral efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation in the region.
- Several U.S. political leaders including President Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton visited the North to bring back apprehended U.S. citizens home.

## B. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S.–ROK ALLIANCE

What implications does this anti-U.S. base sentiment have for the U.S.–ROK relations in the future? The anti-U.S. military base sentiment in the South negatively influences the U.S.–ROK relations in a broad spectrum: political, economy, social, and military affairs. Andrew Yeo argues, “Bases not only fulfill a military function; they represent a *political* arrangement with ‘bilateral, international, cultural, and economic consequences.’”<sup>116</sup> Thus, anti-U.S. base sentiment eventually compromises and undermines the many things that the two countries have built since 1945. First and foremost, anti-U.S. base sentiment undermines and potentially weakens the U.S.–ROK alliance. Dong Sun Lee argues that the South democratization has weakened the U.S.–ROK alliance by increasing nationalism promoted among new political groups and leaders.<sup>117</sup> As anti-U.S. base sentiment increases in the South, it will become more difficult to maintain the U.S. bases in its territory. The U.S. base extraction from the Philippines in the early 1990s should be a prominent case for its outcome. Kent Calder points out that in the late 1980s, the Philippines government under the democratic transition, eventually voted out the U.S. military presence from the country.<sup>118</sup> South Korea’s circumstance is unlike the Philippines. It confronts a prominent security threat from the North at all times. Thus, total U.S. troop withdrawal is unlikely in the near-term.

Nevertheless, U.S. base closure in South Korea may be possible with growing anti-U.S. base sentiment in the country as happened in other countries. In this hypothetical case, many areas could be negatively affected. First, the U.S. war deterrence efforts in the region can be much more difficult and challenging. Andrew Yeo argues, “Overseas bases are the physical units generating the basis structure of the U.S. global defense posture.”<sup>119</sup> Oversea bases eventually facilitate the U.S. military forces by sharing lands and enhancing deployment capabilities such as a quick power projection in conflicted areas in order to defend the U.S. national interest. Without the U.S. military

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<sup>116</sup> Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, And Anti-U.S. Base Protests*, 5.

<sup>117</sup> Dong Sun Lee, “Democratization and the US-South Korea Alliance,” 470.

<sup>118</sup> Calder, *Embattled Garrisons*, 60.

<sup>119</sup> Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, And Anti-U.S. Base Protests*, 5.

forces on the ground, its response to any conflict in the region may slow or even be too late because of the long distance between the U.S. mainland and East Asia. For instance, if the North launches its known range missiles or nuclear weapon systems to South Korea, it may reach anywhere in the South in less than an hour. Of course, it is not enough time for the United States to insert quick reaction forces from the mainland.

On the other hand, building a strong alliance between two countries takes enormous time and efforts from both countries. Thus, if not managed properly, the anti-U.S. base sentiment may quickly reverse the strong U.S.–ROK alliance. The United States and the ROK have a unique and over 70 year-long alliances. The United States and ROK military fought side by side in major combat not once but twice since they established the alliance after WWII. The Korean War in 1950 and the Vietnam War in 1968 are the two well-known wars in which two countries shed heavy blood in combat and suffered a large number of war casualties. This military commitment and sacrifice become solid bedrock for building a strong U.S.–ROK alliance.

Maintaining a strong U.S.–ROK alliance in the region is also critical for keeping peace and stability in not only the South, but also the region and entire world. Rising anti-U.S. military sentiment in the South, if not managed properly, possibly dismiss the security ties between the two countries that may invite a conflict on the Korean peninsula. North Korea, for example, contiguously poses a direct threat to the South and Japan. The Korean War in 1950, the Cheonan patrol ship-sinking incident and the YP-Do shelling in 2010 are a few examples of the North's incessant provocation towards the South. Moreover, its nonnegotiable missiles and nuclear weapons ambition clearly escalates tension and promotes arms race in the region. After the North's nuclear test in 2006, Japan and South Korea often debate their possession of nuclear weapons and prepare for counterattack with a system such as the THAAD system. Apparently, this shows an arms race in the region. Furthermore, the United States and its allies (Japan and South Korea) mutually agreed and codified the Mutual Defense Treaties since WWII, and the United States has an obligation to fight any conflicts of its allies in the region. In the U.S. 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS), President Barak Obama stated that, "We will uphold our treaty obligations to South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and Thailand,



while encouraging the latter to return quickly to democracy.”<sup>120</sup> For this reason, an undisrupted strong alliance will increase the stability in the region.

Furthermore, burgeoning anti-U.S. military sentiment in the South may cause disunity and noncooperation between the two countries. The United States more often than not has been pursued for maximizing bilateral, regional, and international security cooperation as mere means to achieve the national security interests and further on global peace and stability. North Korea’s nuclear nonproliferation, for example, requires all five neighbor states including South Korea to resolve peaceful means. The most recent U.S. NSS reflects that, “In these circumstances, we prefer to act with allies and partners. The threshold for military action is higher when our interests are not directly threatened. In such cases, we will seek to mobilize allies and partners to share the burden and achieve lasting outcomes.”<sup>121</sup> The United States cannot do everything by itself. For this reason, the bilateral or even multilateral security cooperation can be very hard to achieve in the region without maintaining a strong alliance between the two states.

Lastly, anti-U.S. base sentiment affects the political and economic relationship between the two countries. Politically, the United States arguably supported the South’s democratic transition after WWII. Unlike the Soviet Union, the United States kept the South from the communist spillover. Nevertheless, with China’s growing influence in the region, the South may reverse its relationship from the United States to China, especially with increasing anti-U.S. sentiment among younger generations. Economically, South Korea and the United States are prominent economic trade partners. The U.S., for example, had been a South Korea’s prominent trade partner until the early 2000s and still is the South’s most reliable trade partner in the region. In 2003, for example, the South government under the domestic pressure completely banned the U.S. beef imports when the anti-U.S. base sentiment was at its climax. The South was the fourth largest U.S. beef consumer at the time. As anti-U.S. base sentiment grows in the South, chances of the

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<sup>120</sup> “National Security Strategy 2015,” National Security Strategy Archive, modified February 6, 2015, <http://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-2015/>, 24.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 8.

boycott on the U.S. products will likely increase. Conversely, in 2012, the U.S.–ROK Free Trade Agreement that had been developed since 2007 finalized and went to effect.

### **C. CONCLUSION: DEMOCRATIZATION**

Anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea has stemmed from not one particular cause or dimension but from multiple causes and dimensions. Nevertheless, since 1987, the anti-U.S. military base sentiment in the South has emerged primarily with its democratization and reviving nationalism. Prior to the democratization, the authoritarian regime tightly controlled all movements against the government including anti-U.S. base protest because it undermined domestic stability, national security, and most importantly the regime survival. At the same time, any protest against the ruling government was unpermitted and punishable under the National Security Act 1948. Moreover, the anti-U.S. military base phenomenon was prevalent in not only South Korea, but also other countries that hosted the U.S. military forces such as Japan, the Philippines, and Turkey. Under this democratization, it has branched out to several prominent moderator variables: political change, economic growth, freedom of expression, military and security, social change, diplomacy, and globalization. The contributing factors among many variables that caused it to rise and fall also can be categorized as military related and non-military related factors. Military related factors are the USFK member's mishaps, North Korean provocation, and the two governments' base policy such as relocation of bases from the far north to the middle place of South Korea. On the other hand, non-military related factors are the 2002 Olympic game, the U.S. beef imports, the generation gap, equal treatment and equal partner or self-reliance, and most importantly, the two governments' dealings with North Korea.

South Korea's political change has had a huge impact on anti-U.S. base sentiment. After the democratic transition in 1987, each five-year term presidency contributed more or less to developing its democracy and concurrently affected fluctuating anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South. In general, the anti-U.S. base sentiment level in South Korea varies from one political party to another. The Conservative Party leaders prefer, more often than not, pro-U.S. and anti-North Korea lines. For this reason,

Seoul and Washington's political agenda often coincide with each other and less problematic. President Lee Myongbak, for example, quickly dismissed the Sunshine policy and pursued a tit-for-tat hardline toward North Korea. He also lifted the U.S. beef imports ban that was in effect since 2003.

On the other hand, the Progressive Party leaders (President Kim Daejung and President Roh Moohyun) often prefer pro-North Korea and an anti-U.S. line. For this reason, Seoul and Washington's political agenda often conflict with each other. For example, the Kim Daejung administration's Sunshine policy toward the North conflicted with the G. W. Bush administration's hardline policy toward North Korea in the early 2000s. At the same time, President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech vis-à-vis North Korea infuriated the Koreans and sharply raised anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South. As a result, a U.S. favorable survey from the Pew Research Center revealed 46 percent of South Korean participants favored America in 2003 whereas 84 percent in 2015.

Since 1987, media and freedom of expression in South Korea increased and significantly influenced anti-U.S. base sentiment, particularly under the progressive party leaders in office. David Straub points out, "With Korea's democratization and Kim Daejung now in the Blue House, these younger journalists felt freer than ever to criticize the United States."<sup>122</sup> New media outlets, many of them were pro-progressive leaning, were established during the Kim Daejung administration, and they often presented unchecked and lopsided news articles and materials to the public. *Hankyoreh* and *Kyunghyang* newspapers, for example, often criticized U.S. foreign policy toward North Korea and maximized all USFK's mishaps without facts or further scrutiny. Some experts like David Straub believe that the media in the South played a major role in boosting anti-American sentiment.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, each political party utilizes the media for its own benefits and advantages. For example, the conservative party leaders display more U.S.-ROK collaborations than the other party leaders.

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<sup>122</sup> Straub, *Anti-Americanism*, 45.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

#### **D. CONCLUSION: KOREAN NATIONALISM**

The unleashed latent nationalism in the South after its democratic transition in 1987 also has negatively affected anti-U.S. military base sentiment regardless of the U.S. military's critical role in maintaining peace and stability in the Korean peninsula. Korean nationalism can be traced over hundreds of years. Nevertheless, most authoritarian leaders in the South often viewed Korean nationalism as pro-communist and anti-government. For this reason, they believed that Korean nationalism was tainted and harmful for its domestic stability and regime survival; hence, it must be repressed. Nevertheless, this view slowly changed after the leader of the communist pack, the Soviet Union, collapsed in 1991. From 1998 to 2007, the pro-North government leaders under the single bloodline (*Hanminjok*) context in the South conflicted with the U.S. government's interests (hardline/tough) towards North Korea. The pro-nationalist presidents—President Kim Daejung and President Roh Moohyun—sought a rapprochement with its brethren North known as the “Sunshine” policy and held historical summits in 2000 and 2006 respectively during their presidencies. At the same time, growing and prevalent nationalism among young generations worked against the U.S. military presence in the South. The massive protest against the U.S. military after the armored vehicle accident in 2002 marked a generational change and expression of nationalism among the younger generation.

Nevertheless, with the conservative governments' retaking the office since 2008 and the North's aggressions in 2010, killing its own brothers by torpedoing the Navy patrol vessel and shelling the YP-Do affected lowering Korean nationalism. These sudden provocations changed many South Koreans' perceptions of the North from *hanminjok* to the hostile enemy. The South's growing nationalism has certainly elevated anti-U.S. military sentiment in the early 2000s. However, this sentiment dropped when the conservative party retook office in 2008 and the North military provoked the South more than once in 2010 and followed up with continuous missile and nuclear tests. Its sharp resurrection in the short term would be most unlikely in the South, especially with the North's brinkmanship in a nuclear threat and a strong U.S.–ROK alliance.

## **E. CONCLUSION: OTHER FACTORS**

Besides democratic transition and nationalism, other factors also affected anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South. The USFK members' mishaps undeniably affect anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South. This phenomenon is no different from across the borders in Japan and the Philippines. Any mishaps (on and off duty) from the USFK members increase anti-U.S. base sentiment a greater or lesser level in the South. Andrew Yeo points out that on duty mishaps in the near DMZ (air bombs target), the toxic chemical spillage in Yongsan, and the U.S. base relocations from Yongsan to Pyeongtaek, for example, were all distributing factors for the anti-U.S. military sentiment.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, the most well known USFK mishap that elevated anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South was the armored vehicle incident, which killed two schoolgirls, on a local highway in 2002.

Nevertheless, anti-U.S. base sentiment often correlates with South's security threat perception. The USFK mishaps become less critical when the South Koreans perceive high security threats from the North. In 2010, for example, the North's military provoked the South twice by sinking the Cheonan patrol ship and shelling artillery in Yeonpyeong-Do. In addition, North Korea consistently tests the nuclear weapon system and multi-range missiles despite various international efforts to cease the development. The North's aggressive actions immediately raised tensions between two Koreas and eventually increased the security threat level in the South. Thus, it reduced existing anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea.

International and social events also affect anti-U.S. base sentiments in South Korea. Several prominent events in the United States led to increasing anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South. In 2001 shortly after the September 11 terrorist attack in the U.S. major cities, President George W. Bush declared North Korea to be one of the three "Axis of Evil" in the world. This declaration infuriated both Koreas and led to a massive protest in the South. Moreover, an international sports event suddenly raised anti-U.S. sentiment in the South. During the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah, the

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<sup>124</sup> Yeo, *Activists, Alliances, And Anti-U.S. Base Protests*, 130.

South's short track skater, Kim Dongsung, who was also a prominent gold medal contender, became disqualified from the final race despite his winning first place. Therefore, the American skater (Apolo Ohno) who came in later took the gold medal. Many Koreans, however, perceived it differently and opposed against unjust and unfair decisions for the American to win the gold medal. This event triggered massive gatherings in the public areas to overturn Kim's disqualification. In addition, the acceptance of U.S. beef imports in 2008, as part of the new bilateral FTA, by the ROK government fueled the public and increased anti-U.S. base sentiment.

Generation cleavage in South Korea influenced anti-U.S. base sentiment. South Korea reveals prominent generation gaps particularly between the young and old. The older generation with the experience of the Korean War is more often than not pro-U.S. and a true believer in the United States as savior and blood-shed brother. Thus, this generation staunchly supports the United States. Conversely, the younger generation, including the 386 generation who were born between late 1950s and 60s (also known as the post Korean War generation), differ from its fathers or grandfathers. These people are better educated and have different views and attitudes toward the U.S. Many young people are very proud of the country's rapid development and believe the United States acts only in its national interests rather than altruism or a noble cause.

South Korea's rapid economic growth, in part, affected anti-U.S. base sentiment. In line with the generation gap, the young people are the most beneficiaries of the economic growth including self-confidence and pride in the exceptional achievement. Such rapid economic growth allowed Korean citizens to acquire a better education in the country or abroad. In addition, the frequent overseas travel exposed them to new ideas and different views from other parts of the world. For example, people who traveled or resided in China may have different views and perceptions toward the United States due to more exposure to anti-Western rhetoric or propaganda.

South Korea's diplomatic relations with the U.S., China, and North Korea cause anti-U.S. base sentiment to rise or fall. Unlike any other relations, the U.S.-ROK relations have been the strongest since WWII. The United States has been clearly the best ally for the South in terms of its national security and economic development. For

example, both governments agreed to a strong security consensus by codifying the Mutual Security Treaty in 1948 and defended the South from a sudden North's invasion in 1950. Furthermore, the United States provided overwhelming economic aid to the South after the war devastation and helped to stand on its own economic growth. Nevertheless, the relationship briefly changed during President Roh's administration in the early 2000s. Basically, the South's economic reliance gradually shifted from the United States to China. China became number one economic trade partner that surpassed the South's long trade partner, the U.S., by 2004. At the same time, South Korean's security reliance on the U.S. military lessened because of the public perception of the North's threat had dramatically changed with vibrant exchanges between two Koreans from 1998 to 2007.

On the other hand, the Sino-ROK relations rapidly improved primarily over both countries' economic interests. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, China and South Korea quickly established diplomatic relations which were absent since the Japanese colonization of the Korean peninsula. The two states especially have increased tripled amount of economic trade. Thus, many South Koreans perceived the indispensable economic ties between China and the South eventually would help deter the North's provocative actions against the South. Nevertheless, this hope shattered in 2010 by multiple North's military provocations: first, it sunk South's patrol ship Cheonan; second, the North fired artillery shells over YP-Do. From the South's standpoint, China, instead of condemning the North for the provocations, it took a conciliatory position toward South Korea and the South public did not like it at all. China's ambiguous action, after all, turned South Korea to the United States especially for its national security.

Growing anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South undermines the strong U.S.-ROK alliance that had been painstakingly built between the two countries since WWII. Nevertheless, this writer strongly convinced that it will not sabotage the U.S.-ROK bloodshed alliance in near future mainly because of the mutual security treaty and security cooperation between two countries, common democratic values, and mutual economic growth and interdependency are highly valuable and cannot be overtrumped by

the instant rise of anti-U.S. base sentiment. Furthermore, Northeast Asia is strategically a significant region for the United States since the mid-20th century. China, Japan, and South Korea are significant economic partners to the United States. and the rest of the world. This region produces a huge portion of manufactured product not only for the region but also for the whole world that some may have called it as the “world’s factory.”

On the other hand, North Korea consistently poses a security threat to the South and its allies. Its development of missiles and nuclear weapons clearly undermines the stability of the region that would eventually affect the entire world due to prevalent global interdependency. Thus, no countries should overlook nor ignore the North. Instead, the world should find a solution and bring North Korea into dialogue and engagement. This writer is somewhat optimistic about the new U.S. administration management for these sophisticated and messy international affairs in the region today. Clearly, it collaborated with China, one of prominent key stakeholder in the region, to do more in order to resolve North Korea’s nuclear issue.

On May 9, 2017, South Korea once again elected a progressive party leader, Moon Jaein as incoming president after former President Park’s impeachment. Historically, anti-U.S. base sentiment in South Korea rises under progressive party leaders. Nonetheless, unlike his predecessors (Kim Daejung and Roh Moohyun), the newly elected progressive party leader, President Moon Jaein may have learned from previous progressive party leaders. Thus, he may be more prudent and wisely position himself between Washington and Pyeongyang, which is critical to avoid repeating the same mistakes in dealing with North Korea and lower anti-U.S. base sentiment in the South. With growing tensions in the region, a peaceful resolution with the North is much more preferable and strongly recommended under all circumstances. Hope is high, so are the stakes.



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